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NEW NO. 1

NASH Country Weekly

COUNTRY OCTOBER 5, 2015



Thomas
Rhett



Maddie
& Tae

THE NEXT BIG THING?

THE **CMA**
**NEW ARTIST
OF THE YEAR**
NOMINEES ARE
REDEFINING
COUNTRY
MUSIC

PLUS!

PART ONE OF
OUR FOUR-PART
SERIES ON

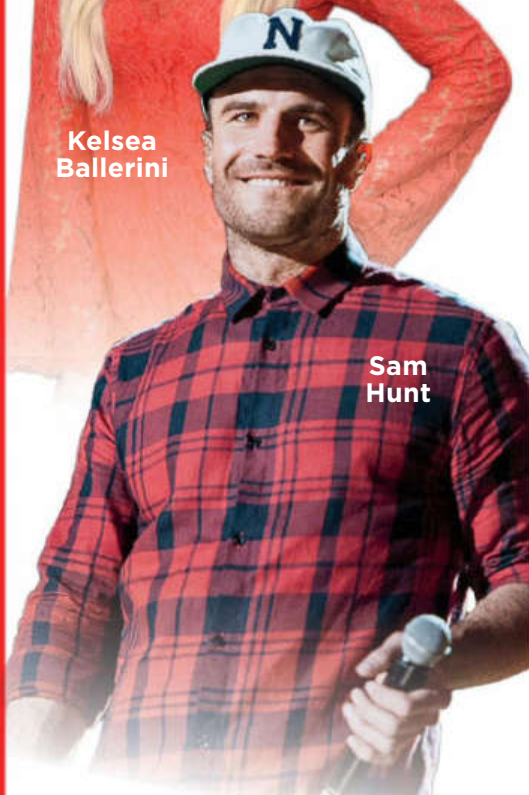
THE OAK RIDGE BOYS
RICHARD STERBAN
IS ALL ABOUT
THAT BASEBALL



Chris
Stapleton



Kelsea
Ballerini



Sam
Hunt

COUNTRYWEEKLY.COM

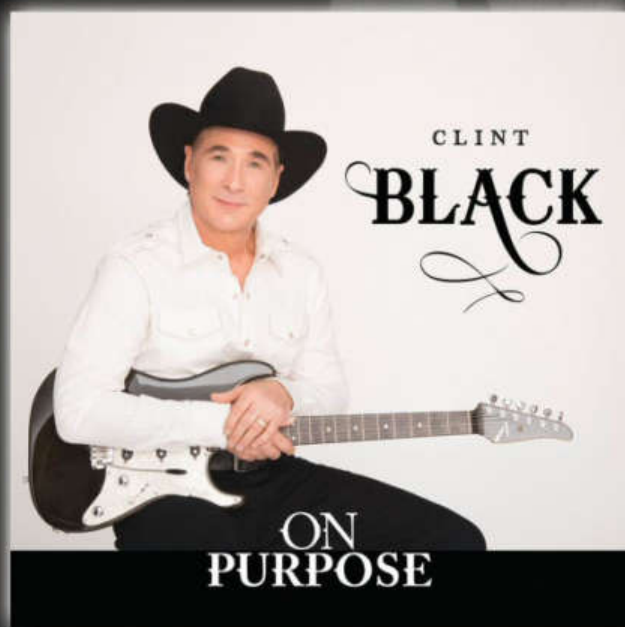
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THIRTY  TIGERS

2001 THURSDAY, OCT. 4



Better by the Dozen

A dozen of country music's top artists and musical pioneers were elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2001. It was the largest class ever inducted in the Hall of Fame's history, and the new members represented both the artistic and business sides of the industry. The new inductees were: **BILL ANDERSON**, **THE EVERLY BROTHERS**, producer and founder of Sun Records **SAM PHILLIPS**, **WAYLON JENNINGS**, bluegrass greats the **DELMORE BROTHERS**, **HOMER & JETHRO**, **THE JORDANAIREs**, honky-tonk hero **WEBB PIERCE**, record executives **DON LAW** and **KEN NELSON**, **THE LOUVIN BROTHERS** and **DON GIBSON**. The Country Music Association held the mass induction as part of the festivities surrounding the opening of the new Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in downtown Nashville. On Oct. 4, 2001, the 12 new inductees were officially honored at a special dinner in Nashville before taking their rightful places in the Hall of Fame.

2015



SEPT. 30 FARM TEAM

LUKE BRYAN gets back to his family farming roots as he embarks on his annual Farm Tour on Sept. 30, in Fort Wayne, Ind. As with his previous tours, Luke will donate a portion of every show's proceeds

for college scholarships, awarded to a student from a farming family in the community where the tour plays. **CHRIS JANSON** is one of the opening acts for every stop on the eight-date Farm Tour.

OCT. 2-3 GRAND OLE BIRTHDAY

The Grand Ole Opry turns the big 9-0 with a special weekend celebration at the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville on Oct. 2 and 3.



The Opry 90th Birthday Bash will feature performances by **LITTLE BIG TOWN**, **JOE DIFFIE**, **OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW**, **MONTGOMERY GENTRY**, **DIAMOND RIO** and likely a few surprise guests. For info and tickets, go to opry.com.

OCT. 3 DOWN BY THE RIVER

DARRYL WORLEY celebrates the 14th year of his annual fundraiser, the Tennessee River Run, with a special concert on Oct. 3, in Savannah, Tenn. Darryl will host the lineup featur-

ing **LORRIE MORGAN**, **WADE HAYES** and **TRACY LAWRENCE**. The weekend event raises money for the Darryl Worley Foundation, which benefits the residents of the area along with several non-profits.



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October 5, 2015

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This year's nominees for the **COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR** represent an exciting cross-section of talent. Find out how they're changing country's style and sound.



PLUS!



27 THE BAND PERRY

siblings are pumped about their upcoming new album on the heels of their current single, "Live Forever."



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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

There is a new batch of country artists leading the way to a new sound in country music. Nominated this year for the CMA New Artist of the Year are Kelsea Ballerini, Sam Hunt, Thomas Rhett, Maddie & Tae and Chris Stapleton. If you think about it, each has their own unique sound, leading many to ask: what does country music sound like today? Well, if the



new crop of artists is any indication, country music will be sounding a lot different than your grandfather's country. Each young artist is influenced by traditional country but goes further to give their songs their own twist with many other influences. As country music continues to grow and change, we take a look at the five newcomers who are vying for the CMA's New Artist of the Year award.

In this week's Nash Next section, we spotlight sibling trio The Band Perry. TBP has a new single, "Live Forever," out now. The trio sat down for a Q&A with managing editor Jon Freeman, who delved deeply into the making of their music, their new single, their collaborations and the significance of the color yellow.

You also may notice our feature on Richard Sterban of The Oak Ridge Boys. Now, don't worry, we didn't forget the other three. We are kicking off a four-part series beginning with Richard and spotlighting each ORB member

in four consecutive issues leading right up to the date of their medalion ceremony, where they will be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. So check out our first story and get to know one of the guys who make up The Oak Ridge Boys. Be sure to pick up next week's magazine as we get down to business with Duane Allen.

Don't miss next week's issue, on stands Oct. 5, as we celebrate the Grand Ole Opry turning the big 9-0!

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!

LISA KONICKI, EDITOR IN CHIEF

MO KNOWS

Thank you for your article on Mo Pitney. I just found out about Mo on "Country's Family Reunion, A Tribute to Ray Price and Honky Tonk." I was very impressed with him. I wish him much success. Hope you feature more of him in your magazine.

RUTH CAREY | Dover, Del.

NCW LOVE

I'm a really big fan of *Nash Country Weekly*. I read it as much as I can. I love the articles of Tim McGraw, Luke Bryan, Jason Aldean and Kenny Chesney. I also like when they are on the cover. I'd also like to see articles on Kip Moore, Justin Moore and Jake Owen. I've read this magazine for years and I will never stop reading. I love that you have their birthdays inside, that you do flashbacks on them and that you put their concert dates inside as well. I really couldn't do without this magazine.

CYNDI McMILLEN | Port Orange, Fla.

FACEBOOK

Kacey sure is keeping it country. Working with great legends like Willie Nelson and Ms. Loretta Lynn!

DALTON CHARLES

Hoping Dierks wins something [CMA], he's too underrated.

VERNON PARKER

Keith and Garth got snubbed for Male Vocalist! I hope Carrie wins. She is due!

SAMI YARLETT

I am really happy about the Chris Stapleton nominations!

GAIL BAILEY DIMMITT

TWITTER

@countryweekly Just saw Ms. Loretta is going to be on the cover of your next issue!!! Thank u! Thank u!! #QueenOfCountry

SUSAN | @SusanSusanswaim

@countryweekly @HunterHayes When is there ever going to be a cover story on @HunterHayes? A full cover picture with an excellent article?

STRESSED2 | @stressed500

FROM THE READER



Shoot us an email, a comment or a tweet and let us know what you think!

Letters, *Nash Country Weekly*, 506 2nd. Ave. South, Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37210

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CYW VACA15

**NASH Country
Weekly**

COUNTRY FOR LIFE

FIRST TAKE

ALL-AGES SHOW

Frankie Ballard meets with Detroit-area youths at the new recording studio he helped open in hopes of giving kids from his home state a shot at learning about professional music-making. The rising star worked on the project in partnership with the Notes for Notes music charity, the CMA Foundation, Chevrolet and Warner Music Nashville, bringing a bit of Music City to the Motor City.





THE COUNTRY BREW

A SWEET TASTE OF ALL THINGS COUNTRY

Opening Act



BOUNTIFUL HARVEST



The Las Vegas-based country music festival Route 91 Harvest, which had its inaugural year in 2014 with more than 20,000 attendees, is back for a second round in 2015. Set for Oct. 2-4 at Las Vegas Village, this year's lineup includes **FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE**, **TIM MCGRAW**, **KEITH URBAN**, **LADY ANTEBELLUM**, **JAKE OWEN** and many others. Additionally, up-and-coming performers will be featured on the Next From Nashville SiriusXM Highway Finds Stage. Check your poker face at the hotel door and get ready for a good time.

photo by John Russell/CMA



(Clockwise from left) **CAVITIES NOT INCLUDED** Maddie & Tae succumb to the temptations of giant gummy bears and Twizzlers at Dylan's Candy Bar in New York on release day; **THE BACKYARD SWAGGERS** (from left) Miranda Lambert, Dierks Bentley and Randy Rogers contemplate forming a new supergroup; **HIGH FIVE** (from left) Emmylou Harris, Reba McEntire, Rosanne Cash, Lucinda Williams and Trisha Yearwood are a stylish bunch of divas at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum; **I HOPE YOU DANCE IN HEELS** Lee Ann Womack spends a little quality time with those very tall Brothers Osborne after a recording session.





(Above) **AIRTIGHT LOGIC** Kimberly Schlapman reacts to Little Big Town's numerous CMA awards nominations the only sensible way: by cutting loose at a moon bounce; (left) **I DON'T WANT TO MISS A SCENE** Aerosmith's Steven Tyler stars as himself alongside Hayden Panettiere's Juliette Barnes in the new season of *Nashville*; (below) **STILL THE TWO** Kacey Musgraves (left) and Shania Twain trade some notes on writing clever, subtly feminist country songs.



(Above) **BETTER LIVING THROUGH CHEMISTRY** Willie Nelson (left) and Kris Kristofferson show support for Fight for Access, which helps ailing people receive non-psychoactive cannabinoids for treatment.



Steven & Hayden by Mark Levine/ABC; Willie & Kris courtesy Willie Nelson facebook; Jamey & Bill courtesy Bill Anderson Twitter; Kimberly courtesy Little Big Town facebook; Kacey & Shmiel courtesy Kacey Musgraves facebook; Alan by Splash News/Corbis



(Above) **GUITAR SONGS** Backstage at the Grand Ole Opry, Jamey Johnson and Bill Anderson cook up a killer country tune; (below) **STAND-UP/LAY-DOWN GUY** Alan Jackson has to get a grip on himself when he plays Rockefeller Plaza for Today.



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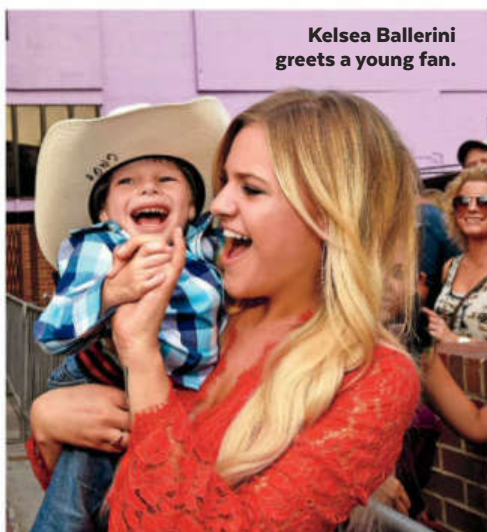
(Above) **MUSIC CITY MAGIC** The ninth annual ACM Honors was held at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium Sept. 1 to salute the organization's special honorees. Jake Owen hosted the event, which included performances from Kacey Musgraves, Jason Aldean, Randy Houser, Miranda Lambert and Chris Isaak, among others.



Alabama



Jason
Aldean



Kelsea Ballerini
greet a young fan.



Roy Clark
(left) and
Luke Bryan



Randy
Houser



Roy
Clark



Chris Isaak
(left), Loretta
Lynn and Josh
Turner



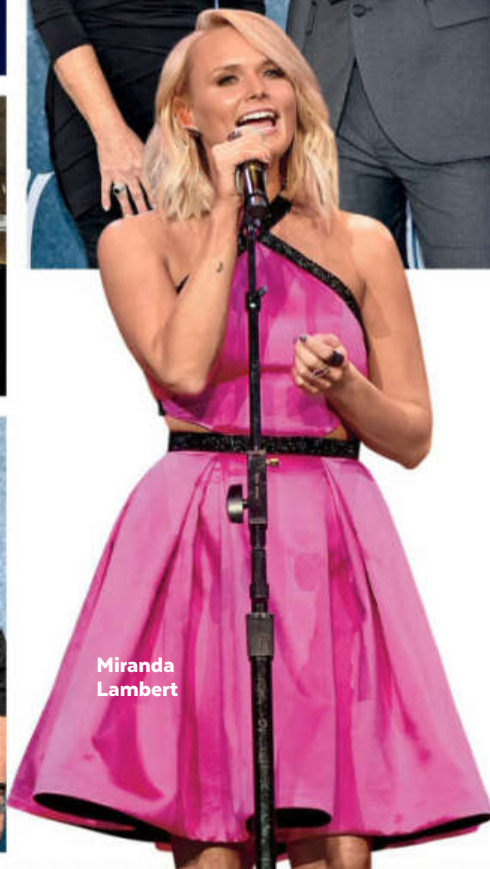
Eric
Church



Jake Owen and
his mom, Mitzi



The
Swon
Brothers



Miranda
Lambert

Ryman, Chris & Jake, Kacey & Holly, and Luke accepting award by Terry Wyatt/Academy of Country Music; SB, guitars, Roy & Luke, Roy & fan, Chris, Loretta & Josh & Luke by Rick Diamond/Academy of Country Music; all other photos by John Shearer/Academy of Country Music



Luke
Bryan



Loretta
Lynn



Kacey (left)
with Holly
Williams



MASCOT MAYHEM

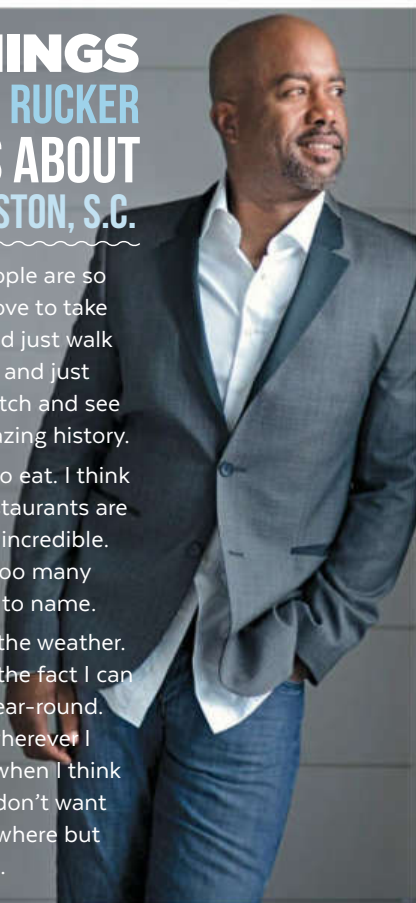
Things might have gotten a bit out of control when **BRAD PAISLEY**, video director Jeff Venable and producer Trent Hardville shot the video for the country star's newest single, "Country Nation." The song, which celebrates blue-collar America and one of the country's favorite pastimes—college football—was brought to life as mascots from more than two dozen college football teams hit the gridiron in Nashville for a scripted game of pigskin. Look for special guest Bobblehead Brad to make the game-saving catch . . . sort of.

3 THINGS DARIUS RUCKER LOVES ABOUT CHARLESTON, S.C.

1 The people are so nice. I love to take my kids and just walk downtown and just people-watch and see all the amazing history.

2 I love to eat. I think the restaurants are absolutely incredible. There are too many great ones to name.

3 I love the weather. I love the fact I can play golf year-round. I can live wherever I want, but when I think about it, I don't want to live anywhere but Charleston.



Golden Ring

WILLIAM LEE GOLDEN of **THE OAK RIDGE BOYS** celebrated his marriage to painter Simone Staley with a ceremony in Nashville on Aug. 29. The wedding was attended by family members and friends, including William Lee's Oak Ridge Boys mates Duane Allen, Richard Sterban and Joe Bonsall.

William Lee and Simone reconnected after first meeting in October 1980 at a show at Knott's Berry Farm in California. They eventually went in separate directions and lost touch with one another, but reignited their friendship in May 2009. By the summer of 2013, William Lee and Simone spent more time with one another, traveling and sharing their love of painting and photography. "It's been the most beautiful experience together," William Lee noted.



NIFTY 50

When **LEE BRICE**'s production manager informed him that the band was just a handful of states away from touring in all 50 U.S. states this year, what was Lee's reply? "Well, we're *doing* it!" A phone call to his management and booking teams put the wheels in motion, and as of today Lee has only 8 states left to visit before he can lay claim to being the first country artist to perform in all 50 states this year. Lee

THE FINAL OF THE 50:

Oct. 4
South
Burlington, Vt.

Oct. 5
Pawtucket,
R.I.

Oct. 14
Morgantown,
W.Va.

Nov. 6
Starkville,
Miss.

Nov. 15
Rome, Ga.

says that some of the shows are in small clubs, but "I have to be able to say I did it."

And if you're in the process of trying to decide which Lee Brice show you want to attend this year, you may want to look at his Nov. 15 show in Rome, Ga. That's where he'll celebrate his cross-country accomplishment, and it's bound to be a party

that's worth the trip, no matter where you're coming from! You can follow Lee on his quest to cover the entire U.S. this year on social media, and if you're attending one of his upcoming shows, be sure to share photos and video with the hashtag #LeeBrice50In52.



LEGEND OF THE FALL

Put this one on your "must see" tour list! "The Gentle Giant," **DON WILLIAMS**, is hitting the road this fall, performing more than two dozen shows in the U.S. and Canada. The native Texan retired in 2006, but fan demand brought him back to the stage in 2012. In 2014, he released his most recent album, *Reflections*, which featured the country music icon performing songs from some of his favorite writers. Don's fall tour kicked off on Sept. 9 in Kansas and continues through Nov. 21, when it wraps in Arlington, Texas.

WHAT'S THIS?

"HOLD"
noun

When the time comes for an artist to record an album, the process starts with writing and looking for songs. If an artist or a representative for the artist hears a song that they would potentially like to record, it is put on "hold," which means they are asking the song's writer or the publishing company that represents the writer not to pitch it to anyone else.

WRITE STUFF

Legendary tunesmith and producer **BOBBY BRADDOCK** is gearing up for the release of

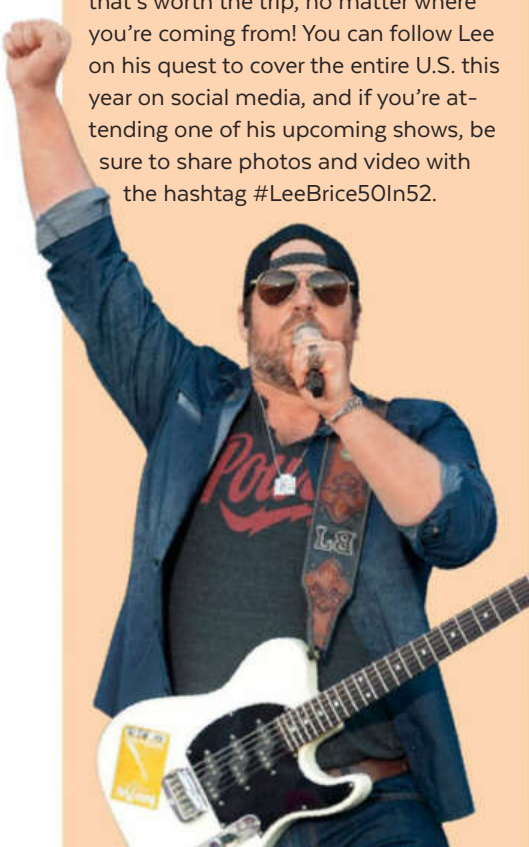
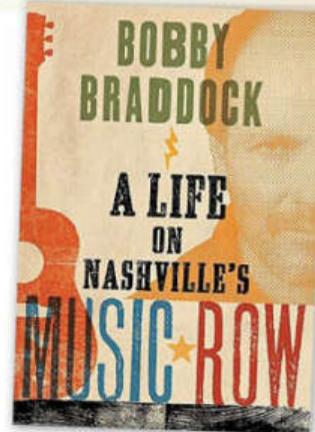


his new memoir, *Bobby Braddock: A Life on Nashville's Music Row*. The Country Music Hall of Fame inductee, who co-penned such hits as "D-I-V-O-R-C-E"

for **TAMMY WYNETTE** and "He Stopped Loving Her Today" for **GEORGE JONES**,

has enjoyed an illustrious career since moving to Nashville in 1964.

Bobby's new book, which will focus on many of the professional and personal relationships he established in Music City, will be available on Oct. 15.



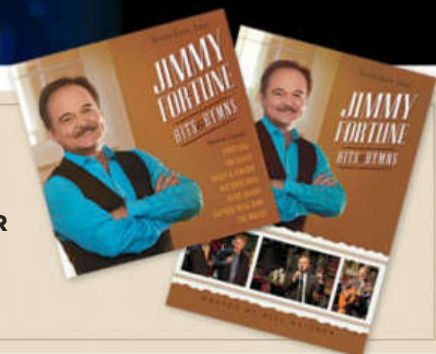


NEW FRIENDS IN OLD PLACES

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of "Friends in Low Places," **GARTH BROOKS** invited his hero **GEORGE STRAIT**, along with hitmakers **JASON ALDEAN**, **FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE** and **KEITH URBAN**, to join him in recording the song for the reissue of *No Fences*. However, the album may never see the light of day. Recently, financial talks between two publishers linked to various songs on the 1990 album hit a stalemate.

Fortunate Son

Country Music Hall of Fame member **JIMMY FORTUNE** is releasing a new album and DVD, *Hits & Hymns*, on Oct. 23. Jimmy, who was a member of **THE STATLER BROTHERS** for 21 years until the group retired in 2002, recruited an all-star lineup of guest collaborators for the new 15-song record, including **THE OAK RIDGE BOYS**, **RICKY SKAGGS**, **VINCE GILL** and **DAILEY & VINCENT**.



HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Any Southern girl worth her weight in peaches knows that college football is a big deal, so when ESPN selected **LAUREN**



ALAINA to create a track for this season's football coverage, it was a big day for the Georgia girl. "For a Southern girl, college football is everything," she says. "Thank you

ESPN for giving me something to make my boyfriend, dad and brother think I'm that much cooler." Lauren's song, "History," which she co-wrote with Jesse Frasure and Emily Weisband, will be used in promotions for the week's top games, along with the playoff semifinals and championship game.



NO REINVENTION NEEDED

Red-hot Broken Bow Music Group (home of **JASON ALDEAN**, **DUSTIN LYNCH**, **RANDY HOUSER** and others) has just launched a new imprint called



Wheelhouse Records that will bring together a beloved star as well as exciting emerging artists. Superstar **TRACE ADKINS** will

anchor the roster, with new music expected from the big man this fall. Texas-based Granger Smith (along with his popular online alter ego Earl Dibbles Jr.) has also signed with Wheelhouse, which is currently promoting his single "Backroad Song."

BIRTHDAYS

SEPT. 28, 1969
KAREN FAIRCHILD
of Little Big Town

SEPT. 29, 1935
JERRY LEE LEWIS

SEPT. 29, 1970
BRAD COTTER

SEPT. 29, 1973
DANICK DUPELLE
of Emerson Drive

SEPT. 30, 1953
DEBORAH ALLEN

SEPT. 30, 1958
MARTY STUART

SEPT. 30, 1963
EDDIE MONTGOMERY
of Montgomery Gentry

OCT. 1, 1968
KELLY WILLIS

OCT. 2, 1954
GREGG JENNINGS
of Restless Heart

OCT. 2, 1967
GILLIAN WELCH

OCT. 4, 1929
LEROY VAN DYKE

OCT. 4, 1960
GREGG "HOBIE" HUBBARD
of Sawyer Brown

OCT. 4, 1970
HEIDI NEWFIELD
of Trick Pony

LITTLE GUNS, BIG HIT

CARRIE UNDERWOOD "LITTLE TOY GUNS" NO. 1 PARTY | BMI | NASHVILLE

SEVEN-TIME GRAMMY WINNER Carrie Underwood looked stunning on Aug. 14 as she celebrated the No. 1 success of her poignant song "Little Toy Guns" with friends and music industry executives at BMI in Nashville.

Penned by Carrie and hit songwriters Chris DeStefano ("Something in the Water" and "Good Girl") and Hillary Lindsey ("Jesus, Take the Wheel," "Last Name" and "Two Black Cadillacs"), the single "Little Toy Guns" marks Carrie's 21st No. 1 hit as an artist.

BMI's Jody Williams and ASCAP's Mike Sistad praised Carrie, Hillary and Chris for their accomplishments and contributions to music, while the songwriters' mutual admiration for each other moved the crowd to tears.

"I'm pregnant so I'm probably going to cry,"

said Hillary. "All of the crazy laughs that we have together, the stupid things that we say to each other, the songs that come out of writing with you and your amazing friendship, I appreciate it more than you know. Now drink some wine for me because I can't."

"The music community in Nashville is so special," Chris told the guests. "That first week of co-writing here changed my life. And after hearing all of

Carrie and Hillary's accomplishments that were shared today, I just thought, 'What am I doing onstage with these two amazing women?' I feel so blessed to be in their life, to have them in mine and to be in the writing room with them."

"Whether we write a No. 1 or something that is just good, it is always a fun day," Carrie said of Hillary and Chris. "I'm just so honored to stand next to you and to be able to have written with both of you. You are the best of the best."

Carrie continued by thanking the music community and country radio for their support as well as the families of every person standing next to her on the stage.

"I want to thank the families of anyone on this stage," she said. "Your support means so much. I want to thank my husband who isn't here to-

day but he is awesome. And my baby [Isaiah]. He had nothing to do with this but I'm going to thank him anyway. Thank you so much. God bless."

Carrie already began her third season as the voice of prime-time television's No. 1 program, *Sunday Night Football*, and on November 4 she'll return for an eighth consecutive year as co-host of the CMA Awards. Her fifth album, *Storyteller*, is due on Oct. 23. **ASHLEY EICHER**



(Back row, from left) BMG's Kos Weaver, ASCAP's Mike Sistad, Artist's Lesly Tyson, BMI's Jody Williams and Sony ATV's Josh VanValkenburg; (front row, from left): songwriter Hillary Lindsey, Carrie Underwood and songwriter Chris DeStefano.

Less Is More

MADDIE & TAE make a pretty pair. The captivating blond-haired duo recently made a splash on CMT's red carpet. Maddie, clad in crisp white, created a dynamic outfit accessorized with pops of color. Tae dressed to impress with a sensational fitted mini. If you want your personal style to make a splash too, here's how to get their red carpet look for a lot less.

MARIA DINOIA



Get The Look!



Maddie's super-stylish white jumpsuit gives off a cool, feminine vibe.

\$176 | nordstrom.com

Her pink clutch lends a burst of color.

\$23.99 | macys.com



The light blue pumps accent the look perfectly.
\$29.90
gojane.com



Tae's on-trend dress flirts with color.

\$54 | lulus.com

This elegant, understated clutch is just the right accessory.

\$29.98

amazon.com

The classic wedge sandal in a neutral color balances the boldness of the dress.

\$24.74
overstock.com



"SHAVING WITH SOAP AND WATER
WON'T GET YOUR LEGS
THIS SOFT AND SMOOTH!"

- Jana Kramer



SHAZAM THIS PAGE
TO PREVIEW HER ALBUM



JANA
KRAMER

thirty one | Available 10/9

For an exclusive first listen to songs
from Jana's new album, *thirty one*,
and chances to win prizes, visit
JanaKramer.com/PureSilk



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without irritation. Shaving with Pure Silk is the easiest way
to love your legs!



MAMA MIA

SARA EVANS SHARES A SIMPLE-TO-MAKE LASAGNA DISH THAT'S JUST RIGHT FOR THOSE COOL AUTUMN NIGHTS.

When the warm-weather season starts transitioning to fall, our culinary thoughts turn to good old comfort food. Sara Evans offers up one of those dreamy, cool-weather concoctions with her take on an Italian-American classic: lasagna. It's a cinch to put together, and you'll only need a little more than a half-hour once the baked, gooey goodness is in the oven. Sara loves to

serve this up to her family, which can include up to seven children at any given time.

Make sure to check out Sara's lifestyle blog, *A Real Fine Place*, for tips on food, fashion, health and other timely topics. Just go to saraevans.com and you'll find your way.

BOB PAXMAN

SARA EVANS' LASAGNA

1 pound ground beef
1 large can spaghetti sauce
Shredded mozzarella cheese
Shredded parmesan cheese
Cottage cheese
1 (16-ounce) package lasagna noodles

BROWN ground beef,
STIR in spaghetti sauce.

In greased baking dish, **LAYER** small portions of raw lasagna noodles, cottage cheese and meat sauce; then add cheeses, mixed together. **REPEAT** until all ingredients are used.

BAKE for 30–40 minutes at 425°.




Sara courtesy PFA Media; lasagna by Masciucci/Corbis

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Nash Country Weekly's **2015 Reader Survey!**

Everyone who completes the survey will be automatically entered in a drawing to win a trip for two to Nashville to attend the CMA Awards on Nov. 4, 2015.



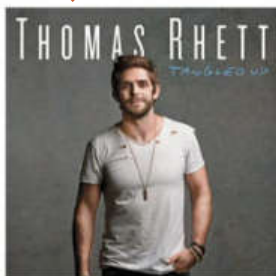
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Album



Thomas Rhett

Tangled Up

VALORY MUSIC CO.

B+

The trouble with playing Spot the Influence is that it gives pretentious music critics (ahem) the ability to dissect an artist's taste and whether or not it's been meticulously curated. There's a note of classist superiority in such an exercise, of implying that an artist may not fully under-

stand his roots. Which is a long-winded way of saying that Thomas Rhett's new album, *Tangled Up*, has a list of intriguing influences far and wide, and he hasn't tried to conceal that nor does he particularly seem to care if they meet some arbitrary definition of "cool." In particular, soul and R&B make their presence known, as on the "Chain Gang" grunts and smiling-through-the-tears Motown melody of the Chris Stapleton-penned lead single "Crash and Burn." Not content to stick with one historical musical movement, Thomas Rhett also hops around giddily from style to style. In "Tangled," TR filters his female obsession through the

ear-bending melodic turns of Stevie Wonder and the robotic body rock of Prince. On "South Side," he picks up some of U.K. producer Mark Ronson's chicken-fried retro funk and turns it into—what else—an irresistible, baritone-sax-honking jam about booty shaking (the posterior being on the body's "south side," and whatnot). "Vacation" is a bit of harmless, mindless fun about partying that nicks War's "Low Rider" bassline, offers up coconut water as a viable mixer and dispenses some hilariously irresponsible advice (*I'm gonna rehydrate while I dehydrate* sounds like a Facebook meme-in-waiting). Where *Tangled Up* loses its foot-

ing is when it falls back too often on the standard red-lined rock production of "Like It's the Last Time" and "Single Girl," making TR sound virtually indistinguishable from his buddies Florida Georgia Line. He's ultimately at his best with a song like "Die a Happy Man" that pits sensual lyrics about love and devotion against an easy guitar groove and pedal steel, forcing him to sound exactly like himself—a new compound of all those influences—in the process.

JON FREEMAN

LONG STORY SHORT:

A bold, surprising (if imperfect) album that will spark debate as well as make bodies move.

Singles



Danielle Bradbery "Friend Zone"

BIG MACHINE RECORDS

D-

To borrow a quote from *The Big Lebowski*, "The g**damn plane has crashed into the mountain." And it appears Danielle Bradbery was in the cockpit. Her new single, "Friend Zone" is a disaster of a song, full of laughably trite sports metaphors and masquerading as a country song via looped banjo. Sure, it's an autotuned pop song, which is no crime, but it's just such a *bad* pop song, with a failed rhyme scheme and repeating filler words. While Maddie & Tae cleverly stuck it to the man with "Girl in a Country Song," Danielle's attempt falls flatter than a pancake and makes a mockery of female empowerment, suggesting women need to be lavished with money to make them feel special and even conjuring up Captain Caveman-like images—not baseball—with the hook *Let me break it down to the facts / You will never get a girl like that / You gotta step up to the plate with a bat / That's all I gotta say about that*. Not even Danielle's purgatorial voice can save this song from its doomed resting place as one of the worst tunes of the year. **JIM CASEY**



Amanda Watkins "If I Was Over You"

IN2UNE

A

No disrespect to the smattering of male/female duets in the past decade, but it's been a while since country music has produced a collaboration that delivers the kind of goosebumps that Amanda Watkins does, with the help of Jamey Johnson, on her new single, "If I Was Over You." In a vein similar to Tammy Wynette and George Jones, Amanda and Jamey sing, and at times wail, about the kind of heartbreak and desire that can only be soothed by single-barrel whiskey, a pack of Luckys and a dark hardwood floor that creaks from the weight of so many aching waltzes. The pair swap lines in the verses, then come together in the chorus in a uniquely staggered union that is filled with such angst, it makes your bones ache. There is an interesting contrast in Amanda's silky soprano and Jamey's gritty baritone that magnifies the struggle of the lyric and evokes the feeling of aching desperation, but there is also something in the blend that, like a deliciously aromatic pipe that fills the air, simultaneously warms you and takes your breath away. **TAMMY RAGUSA**

THE NCW JUKEBOX

Essential songs from
the artists featured
on the cover.

SAM HUNT

"Leave the Night On"

KELSEA BALLERINI

"Love Me Like You
Mean It"

CHRIS STAPLETON

"Traveller"

MADDIE & TAE

"Girl in a Country Song"

THOMAS RHETT

"Crash and Burn"

LOOK FOR THIS
NASH COUNTRY WEEKLY
PLAYLIST ON

rdio

EP

Claire Dunn

Clare Dunn

MCA NASHVILLE

B+



Move it on over. This firebrand female can lay claim as the new gunslinger in town, armed with a roof-rattling voice and serious guitar chops. Clare can wail with the

best of them, getting especially aggressive on "Move On," but she also has enough instinct to know when to take it back a notch—a trait rarely heard in young vocalists—as she does on the poignant "Old Hat." Of the five cuts here, only "Tuxedo" did not wear particularly well, stifled by an awkward melody and overdone production. But four out of five is a darn good batting average, and let's hope to hear a full-length album from Clare in the near future.

BOB PAXMAN





with **Canaan Smith**

The summer of 2015 has definitely been memorable for Canaan Smith. The Virginia native's debut album, *Bronco*, was released in June and after steadily climbing the chart for months, the lead single, "Love You Like That," became his first No. 1. He's been touring with Dierks Bentley, who, along with Kip Moore and Maddie & Tae, surprised him onstage in Bristow, Va., to deliver the good news of his chart-topper. Back in Nashville on a warm summer morning, Canaan settled into a booth at Fido, a popular coffee shop in Hillsboro Village, to catch up with NCW and answer a few questions.

DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

Canaan by Jim Wright/JMG; Canaan & Christy by Rick Diamond/Getty Images

What is your favorite thing to do on a hot summer night?

Drink with friends. Of late, it's been Jameson and ginger [ale], but I also have this little concoction I do on the road. Touring with Dierks, we have this thing called Whiskey Row. I tried Malibu [Rum] and ginger, and it rocks my world.

Who buys your clothes? Is it you, your wife Christy or a professional stylist?

It's me and I'm the pickiest. I do have a great stylist who does pick out stuff for me for certain things like award shows and photo shoots, but on a regular basis, I do all the shopping and I'm the worst, the pickiest guy.

What is your go-to outfit?

Jeans and a T-shirt and a ball cap. That's pretty much what I wear. I love it and I even have a song about it ["One of Those"].

What song changed your life?

"A Better Rain" from George Strait. I remember hearing that song for the first time and having a reaction that literally stirred up so much hurt and emotion. Somebody else [Tony Lane] wrote the song and somebody else sang the song, but yet I hurt for the singer. I'd been through heartbreak before to understand enough to rise above.

What is the first thing you do in the morning?

I shower. I meant to shave today but forgot because if you shave before you shower it's a lot easier. Then eat some cereal and usually go to my studio at my house and start busting out some new song ideas or catch up on emails. Here lately, I'm getting up way before I'm ready to because we just got a new puppy, and he's crying at the foot of the bed, ready to get up and play with somebody.

What's the best song to slow dance to?

I really like "Wrecking Ball" by Eric Church and anything Marvin Gaye.

What day would you choose to live over and over again, like Bill Murray does in *Groundhog Day*?

We had this amazing day on the road. My wife was with me and my band. We were at a winery playing a KRTY radio event somewhere near Napa, California. We did the show and it went great and then we got a private tour over hundreds of acres of vineyards and it was a beautiful thing. We got so drunk on amazing wine. I was rolling down hills with my shirt off. At one point, my guitar player and I had gone off just past the point where the group was hanging out, we faced the mountains and we literally got down on our knees [and] both just said, "Does it get any better than this?" And we took a second to say thanks to God for what an amazing, epic life we get to live.

What's better: snow cones or ice cream cones?

Snow cones. I just had one two days ago at the little retro snow cone truck, but it has to be stuffed. You put the ice cream in the middle.

What is the one thing that you can't live without?

My wife. I can't imagine. I don't know what I did before her and I can't imagine anything without her.

What is a place that you'd like to visit?

New Zealand. Everybody says it's unbelievable and there's no snakes from what I hear. I'm scared to death of snakes.

If you weren't a singer, what would you be doing?

That's hard to imagine because this is what I've done since I was 12. If I'd grown taller and could jump higher I was going to be a basketball player when I was a kid. My dad was my basketball coach and I have four brothers and we were all on the same team so I spent a lot of my formative years on that concrete dreaming of the NBA, but that never happened—I'm too short and way out of shape.

What's the best advice that you've ever received?

Never buy too comfortable of a couch because you'll sit on it too much and get lazy.

What is your favorite car song?

It doesn't mention a car in the title, but it's "Some Girls Do" by Sawyer Brown. I like the line that says, "When I pulled out of your yard, I bald a tire." I love that song and "I'll Take the Dirt Road," also by Sawyer Brown.

What do you want to say to tell *Nash Country Weekly* readers about you that they may not know yet?

I can make the ugliest faces in the world. I love doing it. Only my real close friends and family get to see that side of me. They used to say 'Do the turtle face' when I was young. Another thing is that I've always had an obsession with horses. When I was little I'd run around the house and make all the noises of a horse and jumping over stuff like a horse. I had a little sister and I'd belt-strap a pillow to my back and let her ride around on me because I thought I was a horse, so I got made fun of for wanting to be a horse when I was a kid.



Kip Moore

On the heels of the release of his sophomore album, *WILD ONES*, wild man Kip Moore stopped by the *Nash Country Weekly* office for a quick game of Check Yes or No.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A FLAT TIRE?

YES ☒ NO ☐

DO YOU BELIEVE IN KARMA?

YES ☒ NO ☐

WERE YOU POPULAR IN HIGH SCHOOL?

YES ☐ NO ☒

DO YOU LIKE RAIN?

YES ☒ NO ☐

DO YOU EVER JUMP OUT AND
SURPRISE SOMEONE?

YES ☒ NO ☐

DID YOU HAVE TO RUSH
TO GET HERE?

YES ☐ NO ☒

HAVE YOU EVER MADE
SOMEONE CRY?

YES ☒ NO ☐

DID YOU TRY ON MORE THAN
ONE OUTFIT THIS MORNING?

YES ☐ NO ☒

EVER KISSED SOMEONE
YOU DIDN'T LIKE?

YES ☒ NO ☐

DO YOU FLOSS?

YES ☐ NO ☒

WOULD YOU EAT PICKLED PIG'S FEET?

YES ☐ NO ☒

DO YOU WISH THIS WAS OVER?

YES ☒ NO ☐

NASH *NEXT*

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

BOLD STEPS

THE BAND PERRY REBUFFS EXPECTATIONS WITH THEIR DAY-GLO NEW SINGLE, “**LIVE FOREVER.**”

BY JON FREEMAN



Though “If I Die Young” may have given The Band Perry a career-defining hit very early in the sibling trio’s career, Kimberly, Reid and Neil aren’t content to try to duplicate its quaint, folky style for a life of diminishing returns. The group’s sophomore album, *Pioneer*, showcased them branching out into arena rock with amped up hits like “Done” and “Chainsaw.” “Live Forever,” the lead single from their third album, keeps the bombast of *Pioneer*’s loudest moments but adds the kind of ear-worming melody and production that’s easily palatable for fans of modern pop. Though The Band Perry’s third full-length album has yet to receive a title or release date, lead-off single “Live Forever” is a very good indication that it will be full of surprises. *Nash Country Weekly* had a chance to sit down with Kimberly, Reid and Neil during a recent office visit and asked them about what fans can expect.

NASH COUNTRY WEEKLY:

What are the three of you working on right now?

KIMBERLY: We’re just in town this week rehearsing. Now that we’ve added our first new song from the new album to the set, it’s like now we’re rearranging everything around that one song [*laughs*].

NCW: Where does it fall in the set?

KIMBERLY: It’s actually going to be in the encore. We decided to save one of the best for last and we’re not playing any other new songs except for “Live Forever” right now because we want to wait until the album’s out but we have, what, like 25 shows left?

REID: Twenty-five shows, yeah. You know whenever you find a set that works you kind of wear it out for about a year and a half, which is what we did. And we assumed that this set we’re currently playing couldn’t be rearranged. But we somehow managed to turn this one completely on its head—

KIMBERLY: —And now we like it better.

NCW: Your new single, “Live Forever,” has a pretty evocative opening line with *I was dreaming of war*. Where did you get that idea?

KIMBERLY: If you’ve listened to our first record with songs like “If I Die Young,” [that] is a bit of dark romantic poetry. The verses on “Live Forever” really find that in the narrative. It’s a dream sequence. It’s sort of this idea that goes along with living forever—one of the emotions that sentiment brings about is invincibility.

NEIL: Surviving the odds.

KIMBERLY: Beating the odds, if you will. So we open on a dream sequence where I was dreaming of war and just saw that, even in that most critical, dangerous moment, somehow I was gonna survive that.

NEIL: Sometimes we feel like if you go all the way happy, it makes the song a little cheesier and less respectable. So sometimes we like to counterbalance that with something on the opposite side.

KIMBERLY: If you’ve got a



(From left) Neil, Kimberly and Reid get lifted.

bright chorus, you gotta have a dark verse. If you have a bright verse, you gotta have a dark chorus. That’s sort of our math here in The Band Perry.

NCW: It’s a big anthem that feels like a potential crossover hit in pop. There’s this strange notion that it’s bad for a country act to have

ambitions to have a pop hit, or that you’re abandoning country. What do you make of that?

KIMBERLY: I think for us, any time your ambition is to chase a particular marketplace as an artist—that seems a little disingenuous in the first place. Everything we did for this album was



about chasing authenticity and for what we know our fans have grown to love in our music and what we bring to them. So that was really our goal and wherever that led us melodically is where it led us. On the country side of things, it is authentic for us to have our three-part harmony, Neil's mandolin

and banjo—which he feels like makes [it into] all of the songs we get to release—

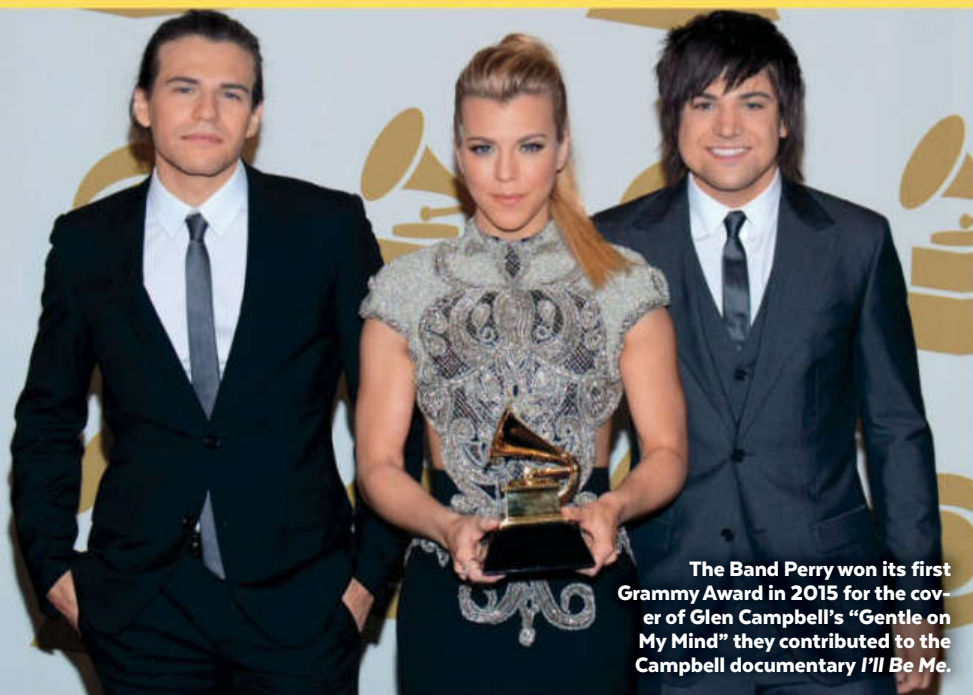
NEIL: *[interjecting in agreement]* Pretty much—

KIMBERLY: —and also to keep that narrative. But this time we were really also compelled to embrace some modern sounds that we love and, quite frankly,

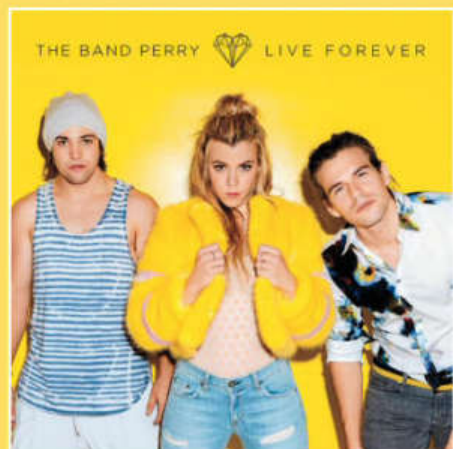
are hearing all over country radio anyway. That's a really special thing: that artists can identify as country but still be able to stretch themselves creatively.

NEIL: As much as, if not more, country artists moving out and expanding their own borders as many people are coming

into country. People think if there's country music going to pop radio that the country artists are going to pop, but a lot of times it's pop asking for that. That shows the power and long-reaching arms of country music, not only on pop radio, but internationally as well. Country should embrace that.



The Band Perry won its first Grammy Award in 2015 for the cover of Glen Campbell's "Gentle on My Mind" they contributed to the Campbell documentary *I'll Be Me*.



NCW: You worked on "Live Forever" with RedOne, who has produced songs for Lady Gaga and Nicki Minaj. How did that experience compare to the typical Nashville songwriting session?

REID: Pretty similar in the fact that whenever you write a song you're sitting there trying to pound out what you want to say in the best way possible. With

RedOne, the way that he likes to work is he likes to produce the track as well as write at the same time.

KIMBERLY: I think we really preferred that, because a lot of times on the first couple records we would write a song on the tour bus or something and you just get out your iPhone and make a voice note of it acoustically. But you then

have to wait until you collect songs and take them all into the studio and see which ones work with a live band, so I actually preferred the method of writing and almost producing the song in the same day. Because you can see almost immediately—

NEIL: —what you have.

KIMBERLY: You know how it's going to fit into the whole

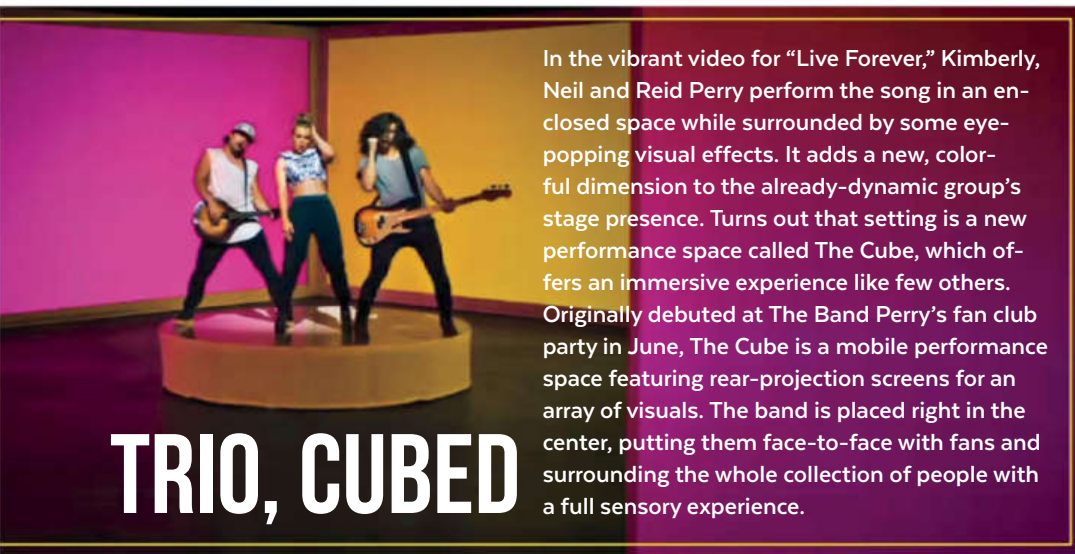
landscape of the album and what you want to say next.

NCW: You also worked with producer Diplo, who has worked with Sia and founded electronic group Major Lazer. What can we expect from that collaboration?

KIMBERLY: [laughing] Why does everybody smile when [I say] Diplo?

REID: It's because his name: [drawing out the pronunciation] "Dip-low."

KIMBERLY: The track he did with us was a ballad. We don't have a lot of ballads on this album, but ironically one of the ones we did with Diplo was. It's a very emotional piece of music. He was interesting because he had never recorded a mandolin before and that was one of the dominant instruments on the track he produced for us. He was so curious about country music and our world and vice versa: we were curious about his.



In the vibrant video for "Live Forever," Kimberly, Neil and Reid Perry perform the song in an enclosed space while surrounded by some eye-popping visual effects. It adds a new, colorful dimension to the already-dynamic group's stage presence. Turns out that setting is a new performance space called The Cube, which offers an immersive experience like few others. Originally debuted at The Band Perry's fan club party in June, The Cube is a mobile performance space featuring rear-projection screens for an array of visuals. The band is placed right in the center, putting them face-to-face with fans and surrounding the whole collection of people with a full sensory experience.



(Above) Neil really gets into recording his vocals; (below) Reid trades his bass for a mandolin.



NCW: The last single you released was the cover of Glen Campbell's "Gentle on My Mind," and that seems so stylistically far from "Live Forever." How important is it for you to show versatility and range?

KIMBERLY: With "Gentle on My Mind" in particular, that was a true honor for us. For us from just an artistic and emotional standpoint, it was a really near and dear song to our heart. But we also knew what was coming next. We knew that "Live Forever" and everywhere we're headed on the new album was coming down the pike and it was very important for us to go back and touch home plate, to say this is what we grew up loving, this is country music, knowing that you guys always expect us to do the unexpected and that's right around the corner for us.

REID: But it won us our first Grammy, so that was really special for us.

KIMBERLY: That was a really nice thing. But it also became clear the place where country music is at the moment. "Gentle on My Mind" was a special moment, but it wasn't one of our biggest moments. So that was the other thing for us to just assess as artists and go, you know, the fans want us to be putting out songs or writing songs that they can fill up an arena and sing along with. That's where our fans are right now.

NCW: How much does that input influence your decision-making? Do you feel like they have to trust you sometimes?

NEIL: It's give-and-take. The three of us are fans, first and foremost, of music as well. I think we're just like everyone else out in the crowd too—whenever they want to dance and move, so do we. Whenever they want to sing along, we do too. I think we

follow trends and where music's heading just like the fans do. They tell us what they want to hear and they also trust us to give them what they want to hear as well.

KIMBERLY: Absolutely. It's funny because the boldest steps we've taken [creatively] over the past five years seem to have been our strongest moments and the fans have grown to trust us in that.

NCW: You always have such a distinct visual aesthetic with each new release. There was *Pioneer*, with its black and white, almost military look . . .

REID: Leather, don't forget the leather.

NCW: And now with "Live Forever," there's a lot of yellow and bright coloring. What is the significance of the visual aspect of your work?

REID: You kind of hit the nail on the head. When we write

any song or project we have these ideas and visions in our head about what it should be. For songs like "Better Dig Two" and "Done" it was very militaristic, moving forward in a synchronized fashion, so a lot of black leather, very underdog spirit about it. But for when we were writing "Live Forever" in this third era of The Band Perry, we had a lot more joy and smiles on our faces when we were leaving the studio.

KIMBERLY: We had more fun than ever before.

REID: So we wanted to find visuals that represented that to us, that accompanied songs like "Live Forever" and other ones off the project. Yellow was the complete opposite of black leather and it was the best representation of what we felt.

KIMBERLY: [laughs] We weren't going to tiptoe into the rainbow. We were going to find the boldest shade we could. ■



QUINTESSENTIAL CLINT

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS
AFTER HIS BREAKOUT,
CLINT BLACK IS STILL
REFINING HIS ARTISTRY.

STORY BY TAMMY RAGUSA

Clint Black is a singer's singer, a writer's writer and a musician's musician, which means he has the qualities that others adept at those skills admire. But with the exception of 2008's *Long Cool EP* and a 2013 Cracker Barrel compilation of mostly rerecorded hits, Clint has largely been absent from Nashville's country music scene since his 2005 *Drinkin' Songs and Other Logic*.

Even so, this member of country music's historic Class of '89 has been far from idle. He and wife Lisa Hartman Black have spent the past 14 years raising their only child, daughter Lily Pearl, who is about to start high school. He's made television appearances on *Celebrity Apprentice*, Lifetime's *Coming Home* and in the movies *Flicka 2* and *3*, continuing his foray into an acting career that began in 1994 with the James Garner, Mel Gibson and Jodie Foster flick *Maverick*.

He's also been courted by major record labels in Nashville that recognize his distinctive style and timeless talent. Had he signed with one of them, we may not be enjoying what we now know as Clint's new album, *On Purpose*. The collection will likely resonate as familiar with longtime fans, but also strike a chord as sonically contemporary with new country music listeners. After more than 25 years in the ever-evolving music business and claiming most of his success at the beginning of his career, how did Clint strike that balance?

"I hope it does sound contemporary, but it wasn't me trying to fit in," responds the affable country star, calling in to *Nash Country Weekly* on a sunny Nashville day. "At the very most I'd say it was me knowing where the boundaries are today and knowing where my boundaries are personally with songs."

Unlike many who cite as influences artists who had success prior to their own—in Clint's case, Merle Haggard, Buck Owens, Willie, Waylon, James

Taylor, Jim Croce and others—Clint also nods to artists who are current as having an effect on his sound. "I'm still influenced," he adds. "I'm hearing artists today and seeing what they're doing and how far they're pushing it and I'm sure that plays into my guitar tones, etc."

Guitar tones are one of the things that made Clint an artist outstanding in his class of peers in the late '80s. An ace picker, he even produced and recorded his *D'lectrified* album without electric instruments and sacrificing none of its electricity. But defining the Clint Black sound started at the very beginning with 1989's *Killin' Time*. Writing his own songs,

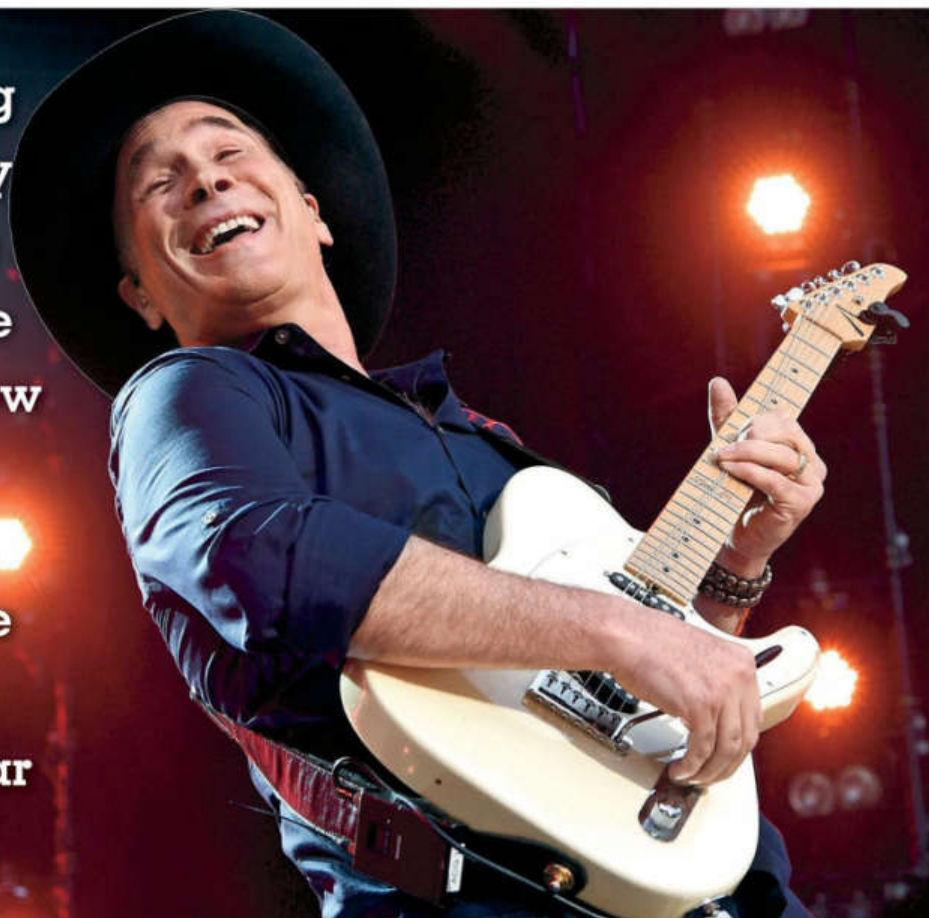


(Top) The new album; (above) *Celebrity Apprentice* with Herschel Walker (left) and Brian McKnight; (bottom) *Flicka 2*.

playing his own guitar and producing his own projects are what has established not only a brand, but a connective thread from one album to the next, despite the lapse in time. "I think just as a result of one artist driving the train, it's going to hang together and it's going to feel like there's cohesion there," he explains. "Always, but even more now because I do more of the guitar work, I pour so much of myself into this, it's hard to imagine that it's not going to have that result. I'm there every time that tape rolls, so to speak, and all of my sensibilities and all of the things I like, the things that turn me on musically, that's the gauge for every bit of it and without regard to what the head of this record company thought or that company thought, I have my group of people around me that I ask, 'what do you think,' and I take whatever they say with a grain of salt and then I do what I want to do. For that reason, and it's the same as it was with *Killin' Time* and every album that followed for that reason, it's me and what I want."

Another thing that gives Clint's projects a thread of continuity is his attraction to songs about time. From *Killin' Time*, which spawned the No. 1 title track to *On Purpose*, with the debut single, "Time for That," the infatuation comes from a very real and personal place. Clint chuckles as we point out the obvious, then explains, "I thought I was going to be dead before I was 16 when I was 14—'There's no way I'll live to get a driver's license. Oh, a driver's license. There's no way I'll live to maturity. Oh, I'm 18 now. Alright, but 21 is out of the question.' Growing up in the shadow of the Vietnam War, my brother was almost called up, but they started drawing down, my grandpa died of cancer, I think for a young kid all those things made me aware of this precious thing that goes away. And it's also, probably just as much, it's a subject like love and Christmas. You could write forever and never stop explor-

"I'm hearing artists today and seeing what they're doing and how far they're pushing it, and I'm sure that plays into my guitar tones, etc."



CLINT BLACK CONTINUED

ing new things on the same subject." He pauses, then laughs, "I thought about writing 'Still Killin' Time.'"

While the faux follow-up to "Killin' Time," didn't make the final cut for *On Purpose*, "You Still Get to Me," a classic shuffle recorded with his sometimes reluctant duet partner and wife Lisa did. "She agreed to do this one, but she still was encouraging me to go another direction and I think that's partly her humility and partly her knowing that if we had another hit together, which would be great, she knows that I would be relying on her and she's really a full-time mom," he says. "And she turned down other opportunities because it would have taken her out of the home too much. She's pulled both ways, but she knows also that when I write a duet for us, I'm not going to sing it with someone else. And Victoria Shaw and I wrote that specifically

for Lisa and me. She's glad she's on there. She's glad to have another song to do that's not 'When I Said I Do,' but is a little further down the road. I love the feel of the song, I love that she has her own verses and I love that she's going to have to show up next week and sing it live. I get a big kick out of her being onstage with me."



Clint and wife Lisa Hartman Black

With *On Purpose* finished and released, being onstage is what Clint is focusing on now. He admits that he doesn't stop finessing and fine-tuning his live performances. "I do every day, at some point of the day, I think through the show and the song order and what we're doing with the songs. I never stop thinking about what we can do better or what we can have more fun with than we're having or is there a song that would be better here or would that song be better there. And there's probably not a day that goes by that I'm not thinking about the show and how to improve it."

That kind of compulsion is impressive, but is Clint striving for perfection?

"I think of being a perfectionist as a sickness where you really believe things can be perfect and I know better," he adamantly professes. "I like to use the word 'excellence' because you can achieve that, but you can't achieve perfection." **NCW**

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Mr. Baseball

THE OAK RIDGE BOYS' RICHARD STERBAN STEPS UP TO THE PLATE TO SHARE HIS PASSION FOR THE NATIONAL PASTIME DURING THE FIRST PART OF OUR FOUR-PART SERIES ON THE OAKS.

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN





The Oaks—(from left) Duane, Joe, William Lee and Richard—accept a Grammy in 1975. (Below) Forty years later, they're rocking the stage at the 2015 CMA Music Festival.

The Oak Ridge Boys—Duane Allen, Joe Bonsall, William Lee Golden and Richard Sterban—represent four distinct personalities who have managed to blend together as one unified quartet for more than 40 years. Perhaps one reason for their longevity is that all four enjoy their own personal hobby that keeps them occupied and fulfilled when they're not on the road or making music in the studio.

As The Oaks prepare to enter the Country Music Hall of Fame on Oct. 25, *Nash Country Weekly* will profile each member and his own unique hobby for a special four-part series. Appropriately, Richard Sterban, possibly the most recognized bass voice in country music, takes the leadoff spot to talk about his passion for the great American game of baseball.

Richard can often be seen sporting the jersey of the Nashville Sounds, the Triple-A minor league affiliate of the Oakland A's. He was an early investor and part owner of the Sounds until an outside group bought the club after the 2008 season. You can still spot him at Sounds home games at the city's spanking-new First Tennessee Park as well as the home contests of the Vanderbilt Commodores SEC college squad, which took the national championship in 2014.

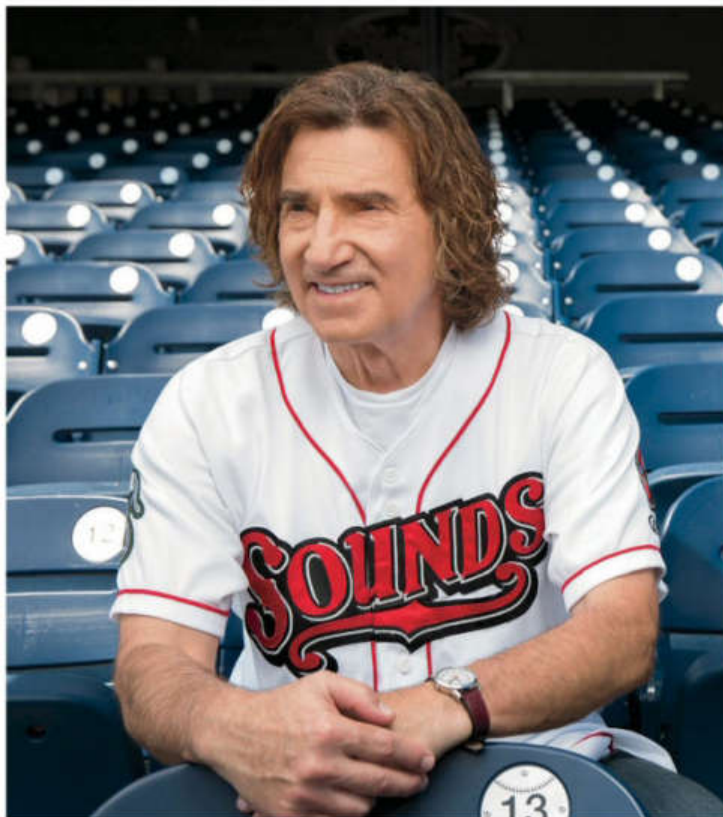
Richard's love affair with baseball began, not surprisingly, as a youngster growing up in Collingswood, N.J., in the shadow of Philadelphia. He rooted for the often-hapless Philadelphia Phillies, whose diamond successes



were generally overlapped by their far more frequent failures. For historical perspective, it took the franchise 77 years to win its first World Series title.

"I had an uncle who took me to my first major league game when I was 3 years old," Richard begins, smiling at the still-vivid memory. "We went to see the Phillies against the Chicago Cubs at the old Connie Mack Stadium in Philadelphia. I probably can't tell you much about the game itself, but I do remember the experience." The sights, the buzz of the crowd and even the smells captivated the young kid.

"I remember walking into the ballpark," he continues, after a brief wistful gaze upward. "You look at the green grass and those white base lines and it almost takes your breath away. Even this morning," Richard adds, "when we pulled up to First Tennessee Park for this story, I was



Favorite Phils

Ask Philadelphia Phillies fanatic Richard Sterban about his top all-time Phillies players, and you'll get no balks from the deep-voiced Oak Ridge Boys singer. "The two players I first became familiar with were Robin Roberts (the pitcher, not the *Good Morning America* co-host) and [outfielder] Richie Ashburn, in the 1950s," Richard recalls. "All the kids in the neighborhood wanted to be one or the other. I loved Ashburn because he played so hard all the time."

The Phillies have won the World Series twice, in 1980 and again in 2008. But Richard's all-time favorite team was the 1950 squad known as the 'Whiz Kids' for their youth and give-it-all-you-got fervor. The "Whiz Kids" made it to the World Series that year, but were swept by the New York Yankees, four games to none. "I was pretty young then," says Richard, now 73. "But I still remember how they played and they were great. It broke my heart when they lost the World Series."

RICHARD STERBAN CONTINUED

like a little kid again. There is just a certain feel to a ballpark."

Dissecting and analyzing the game became part of Richard's seasonal routine. He checked daily box scores and statistics with an accountant's penchant for detail. Playing the game, however, proved another matter. By his own grinning admission, he struck out in terms of major league potential.

"I was not very good," Richard laughs. "I did play a little bit when I was in junior high. I was a catcher, and I was all right behind the plate. But I could not hit. The head coach tried to be kind to me by making me first base coach. I think he saw my enthusiasm for the game and wanted to keep me on."

That youthful enthusiasm continues to the present day. Richard attends games when his busy schedule allows, but he keeps up with all the action via cable television's myriad offerings and various cellphone apps. "We have all the channels on the bus, the MLB Network and the Extra Innings package," he notes. "I

have the MiLB package on my computer, which allows me to follow minor league baseball wherever I am."

On occasion, you might even hear Richard's well-modulated, deep bass voice behind the microphone at Nashville Sounds or Vanderbilt home games. He has helped out with play-by-play on local broadcasts when opportunities arise, and it's the closest thing to a dream gig



Richard hits the bass notes at a 2007 Grand Ole Opry performance.

for the baseball buff. "I have probably done it more for Vanderbilt," Richard says. "But I always enjoy it. You really get close to the game."

And even though Richard no longer serves as a Nashville Sounds owner, he remains involved with the club. "I was there from the very beginning, when they first announced that Nashville would be getting a team in the late '70s," Richard says. "The Oak Ridge Boys had our first big hit and I finally had a few bucks where I could invest. I loved all our teams but I was really close to the guys when we were associated with the Milwaukee Brewers for about the last 10 years. I would watch them at batting practice and hang out with them before a game."

Richard's years of support have not gone unnoticed by the Sounds' management. "They have made me an official team ambassador," Richard says, smiling. "And I guess I'm performing one of my duties today. Anything they want me to do, I will gladly be on board." Or, perhaps more precisely, step up to the plate. **NCW**

WHEELS IN MOTION

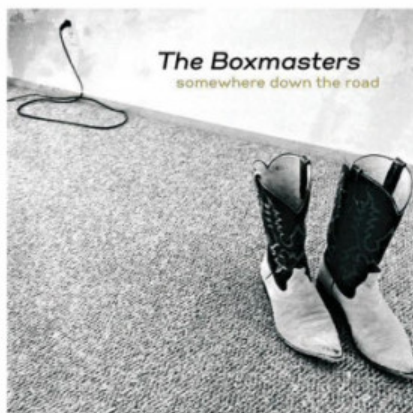
THE BOXMASTERS, led by Billy Bob Thornton, never stop working.

Whether entertaining at the Grand Ole Opry or performing at the swanky Livewire in Scottsdale, Ariz., The Boxmasters have consistently proven they are at home on any stage. Fronted by Academy Award winner Billy Bob Thornton, the prolific band has been touring in support of the double CD set *Somewhere Down the Road* and recently released *Providence*, a new collection of songs from their extensive vault, for online purchase.

Seated in a dressing room backstage at the Opry, Billy Bob says he's honored to have played country music's most revered venue. Though The Boxmasters are primarily a rock outfit, Billy Bob has collaborated with Nashville pals Marty Stuart and Mark Collie, and he has a deep respect for country music's traditions. "My uncle played country music and I played drums in his band when I was a teenager," he says. "I especially listened really hard to the Jim Reeves++ records. He was probably the first country singer that I admired."

If there's one thing The Boxmasters love more than making music in the studio, it's performing live for their fans. In fact, when the foursome made their Grand Ole Opry debut, they were in the middle of ++a busy tour with very few days off. Still, as band member J.D. Andrew notes, they are making new friends on the road. "Everywhere we go we get a lot of [people saying] 'We haven't heard you before. We haven't listened to any of the music before but we love it and we're going to buy the record,'" he says. "That's the main thing that keeps us going."

In order to keep touring, Billy Bob has to plan around his other career as one of Hollywood's most in-demand actors. In October, he can be seen in *Our Brand Is Crisis* with Sandra Bullock. Additionally, he has signed on for a



10-part series like FX's *Fargo*, for which he won a Golden Globe Award. "It's called *The Trial* and it's just wonderfully written," he says. "I didn't think after *Fargo* that I'd find anything in television that I was hot to do, but this is really wonderful, so I start that this fall."

When The Boxmasters' current tour

ends, the band will be heading home to their respective families. J.D. and his wife are expecting their third child next spring and Billy Bob is looking forward to spending time with wife Connie, their 11-year-old daughter, Bella, and the two King Charles Cavaliers (named Charlie and Cali by Bella) he got for his 60th birthday.

"We wanted to get rescue dogs," he explains, "but King Charles Cavaliers are breeder dogs and are expensive. We figured you're never going to find those dogs in a rescue but [we found them] down in Temecula, California. I guess some breeder bred too many dogs. They are nine months old and they are brother and sister. They were at a rescue, so I ended up getting King Charleses and rescue dogs all at once."

Sounds exactly like providence.

DEBORAH EVANS PRICE



(From left) Teddy Andreadis, Billy Bob Thornton, J.D. Andrew and Brad Davis.

SHOOTING STAR POWER

Five of country music's most talented newcomers are vying for this year's **CMA New Artist of the Year** award.

WINNING THE CMA NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR award is more than a nice feather in your cap—it's a pretty accurate barometer of future country music success. Since the inception of the award in 1981—when it was known as the Horizon Award—a who's who of country music luminaries have won the trophy, including Ricky Skaggs (1982), The Judds (1984), Randy Travis (1986), Garth Brooks (1990), the Dixie Chicks (1998), Keith Urban (2001) and Carrie Underwood (2006).

When the prize was renamed the New Artist of the Year in 2008, Lady Antebellum was the first artist/group to take home the accolade, followed by six more acts that are currently living up to their newcomer hype, including Darius Rucker (2009), Zac Brown Band (2010), The Band Perry (2011), Hunter Hayes (2012), Kacey Musgraves (2013) and Brett Eldredge (2014).

While this year's nominees—Sam Hunt, Kelsea Ballerini, Maddie & Tae, Thomas Rhett and Chris Stapleton—are all worthy of the award, only one will be crowned the New Artist of the Year, which honors the artist or group that has demonstrated significant creative growth and development in overall chart or sales activity (of a debut or sophomore album), live performance, professionalism and national media recognition related to the launch of their career.

In this special cover story, the *NCW* staff breaks down the accomplishments of each nominee to give you an inside look at their claim to the title. You may not get a vote, but you can sure voice your opinion on social media before the award is handed out on Nov. 4 at the 49th annual CMA Awards.

CHRIS STAPLETON

"THE VOICE"

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- **Billboard No. 2** album, *Traveller*
- **Co-writer** on Thomas Rhett's No. 1 single, "Crash and Burn"

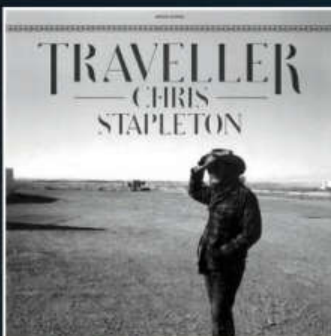
Chris Stapleton may be a new name to casual country fans, but the singer/songwriter has been one of Nashville's most respected talents for more than a decade. In addition to co-writing *Billboard* No. 1 songs "Your Man" (Josh Turner, 2005), "Never Wanted Nothing More" (Kenny Chesney, 2007), "Come Back Song" (Darius Rucker, 2010), "Drink a Beer" (Luke Bryan, 2013) and "Crash and Burn" (Thomas Rhett, 2015), Chris was the lead singer/guitarist for the Grammy-nominated bluegrass outfit The SteelDrivers from 2008–2010. If you've been listening to country radio in the last 10 years, there's a good chance Chris had a hand or voice in what was playing, from Miranda Lambert's "Nobody's Fool" to George Strait's "Love's Gonna Make It Alright."

With credentials like that—and a voice that's as dark and gritty and beautiful as a slab of coal from his home state of Kentucky—Chris' debut solo album, *Traveller*, which dropped in May, was a welcome throwback to the days of Willie, Waylon and the boys. The 14-song offering, of which Chris co-penned 12, is a cross-country journey of varying speeds, bookended by the optimistic title track that starts the trip and the live recording of "Sometimes I Cry," which serves as the road-weary destination point. In between, *Traveller* is full of hard drinking ("Whiskey and You"), good women ("More of You") and bad choices ("Nobody to Blame") that highlight Chris' compelling songwriting, musicianship and vocals.

While the album received virtually no radio airplay compared to the works of his fellow New Artist of the Year nominees, critics took notice, dubbing it one of the best albums of 2015. And that's why he also picked up CMA nominations for Album of the Year and Male Vocalist of the Year. *Traveller* also netted Chris one of the final musical appearances on *The Late Show With David*



(Below, from left) Songwriter Ronnie Brown, Kenny Chesney, Chris Stapleton and ASCAP VP Connie Bradley celebrate Kenny's No. 1, "Never Wanted Nothing More."



Letterman and a slew of spring and summer tour dates with Eric Church and Little Big Town. He may not have a single in the Top 20 and he's not exactly "new," but Chris Stapleton is a breath of fresh air next to the bro-loving, pop-doting albums of 2015.

Chris is no longer lurking in the shadows. The country throwback is front and center in 2015, and he may just be the one who helps usher in the next wave of talented old-school artists.

MADDIE & TAE

"THE DYNAMIC DUO"

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- No. 1 song, "Girl in a Country Song"
- Gold-certified single, "Girl in a Country Song"
- Top 10 single, "Fly"
- Only third female duo in history to have debut single reach No. 1
- Sounds of Summer Tour with Dierks Bentley, Canaan Smith and Kip Moore
- No. 2 country album, *Start Here*

Poor bro country. It was probably just too buzzed on PBR and preoccupied with building a bonfire on the creek bank (safety first, kids!) to see it coming. Masquerading as another bubblegummy country tune with some hip-hop touches, Maddie & Tae's "Girl in a Country Song" was like a sneak attack from the world's two most giggly muggers. One by one and with sniperlike efficiency, Maddie Marlow and Tae Dye took down all the misogynistic, knuckleheaded clichés (painted-on jeans, bare feet, being called "honey," etc.) being churned out by their peers—even being so bold as to

sneeringly reference several of those songs. It seems insane that this was the debut single for a pair of then-teenaged girls—had it happened six months earlier, it could have been disastrous on all fronts. But as it was, attitudes were open to the possibility of a shift and "Girl in a Country Song" was like a survey, demolition and construction crew all rolled into one.

After it hit No. 1, then came the hard part for Maddie & Tae: proving they were more than a novelty group with a clever song. That might explain why follow-up single, "Fly," has been such a slow crawl to reach the Top 10. As a slowed-down ballad about overcoming fear and doubt, it was completely different than "Girl in a Country Song" but left no doubt about Maddie & Tae's deep country roots. Furthermore, it hinted at the wide range of their songwriting—capable of commenting on love, friendship, self-doubt, growing up and the state of country music with astonishing clarity.

All that and more shows up on the duo's recently released debut album, *Start Here*, which made a nice showing at No. 2 its first week available for purchase. For anyone who wondered if the pair was some fabricated product from the house of Scott Borchetta (seeing as how he was involved), they spent spring and summer blowing minds on Dierks Bentley's Sounds of Summer Tour, singing those Tae-arranged, pluperfect harmonies without the assistance of autotune. Let's face it: bro country didn't stand a chance.



(Above) Maddie Marlow (left), songwriter Aaron Scherz and Tae Dye celebrate the No. 1 success of "Girl in a Country Song."



M&T with Aaron by Amiee Stubbs; M&T perf by Kevin Winter/Getty Images; Sam perf by Laura Farr/Corbis/Shane Sam, Josh & Zach by Alan Paizner/UMG Nashville



SAM HUNT

“THE SENSITIVE GUY”

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- 3 No. 1 songs, “Leave the Night On,” “Take Your Time,” “House Party”
- Platinum-certified single, “Leave the Night On”
- Double Platinum-certified single, “Take Your Time”
- No. 1 album, *Montevallo*, for nine nonconsecutive weeks
- Best-selling first week by a debut artist since 2011
- Wheels Up Tour with Lady Antebellum and Hunter Hayes
- Sold-out headlining Lipstick Graffiti Tour

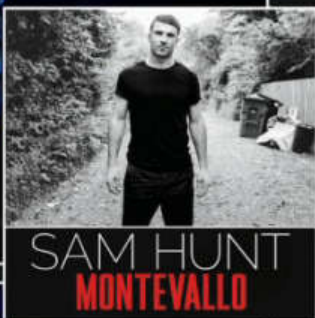
There have been few other new country artists as polarizing—or as wildly successful—as Sam Hunt has been since his official arrival in 2014. The towering former quarterback was already a well-respected figure in Nashville’s close-knit songwriter circles, having penned No. 1 hits for Kenny Chesney (“Come Over”) and Billy Currington (“We Are Tonight”) before releasing his first single, “Leave the Night On.”

Sam put on full display the elusive, surprising character of his artistry with that tune—even though it was about staying out late and having a good time, it wasn’t the standard template of moonshine and tailgates that was so popular with radio. It was wildly futuristic for country production (in that it favored drum loops and synthesizers to steel and banjo) yet the lyrics had a sense of wordplay and detail about small-town life that owed much to bedrock country songwriting.

Discussions about Sam—tall and athletic, but dressed in bold pastels and whites—were often heated in the way that political discussions around the family dinner table get heated. Is he country? Is he a pop artist masquerading as country? Where are his boots? None of that really seemed to matter in the long run, however, because Sam has made significant inroads in both worlds since the release of his debut album, *Montevallo*, in October 2014.

That collection, which includes the hits “Take Your Time” and “House Party” along with “Leave the Night On,” hasn’t left the Top 5 of *Billboard*’s Country Albums chart since then. Its first three singles have topped the country charts, of course, but also landed inside the Top 40 of *Billboard*’s all-genre Hot 100 chart. The gritty video for “Take Your Time” doubled as a statement on domestic violence and though that song’s breathy, spoken verses owed as much to rap as country, it painted a vivid narrative of the encounter.

So while he’s clearly not Conway Twitty reincarnate—the most outspoken critics see him as an interloper—Sam still has the country bona fides. Look no further than “I Met a Girl,” the super-traditional new single from hat act William Michael Morgan that was co-written by Sam. There isn’t anyone else quite like him, and years from now we may still be seeing artists playing catch-up.



(From left) Songwriter/co-producer Shane McAnally, Sam Hunt, songwriter Josh Osborne and co-producer Zach Crowell are all smiles at the No. 1 party for “Leave the Night On.”

KELSEA BALLERINI

"THE DREAM GIRL"

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- No. 1 single, "Love Me Like You Mean It"
- No. 4 album, *The First Time*
- First female solo artist to reach No. 1 with debut single since 2006

In light of recent developments, you can easily say that the 22-year-old Kelsea has wielded a mighty cultural impact. She became the first female solo artist to hit No. 1 with a debut single since Carrie Underwood accomplished the feat in 2006 with "Jesus, Take the Wheel." Kelsea's success grew into a rallying cry for all young female artists, as she snapped the string held by male artists and briefly ended the dominance of so-called "bro country" fare on the charts.

Her No. 1 chart success came in the wake of what was occasionally referred to as "Saladgate" by industry insiders. The controversy was stirred up by a well-known radio programmer, who recommended that radio stations play fewer songs by women. Female artists, he went on to expound, were the "tomatoes" on the buffet table of radio airplay. "They're just not the lettuce in our salad," he further noted, setting off a firestorm of protest. Kelsea's timing could not have been more perfect or certainly more satisfying for the female contingent.

Kelsea's follow-up single "Dibs" appears to continue the momentum built by "Love Me Like You Mean It." It was the most-added song at radio during its release week, indicating that programmers are fully on board with Kelsea. It likely also means that she's grabbing the attention of male listeners along with the somewhat built-in female core audience.

And Kelsea has parlayed that early success into career gold. In addition to her Country Music Association award nomination for New Artist of the Year, Kelsea also picked up a nod for Female Vocalist of the Year, one of the major CMA honors. It's as if she skipped the middle portion of the career arc and went straight to the head of the class.

As far as musical direction, Kelsea's sound, while not exactly pioneering, is a pleasing amalgam of country and pop styles. There may be a bit more country to Kelsea's voice, owing to her East Tennessee roots. Her music, particularly in the case of "Love Me Like You Mean It," takes an assertive stand without sounding overly aggressive, an approach that would seem to serve her well across the board. And though this may have more to do with cosmetics than real aesthetics, it doesn't hurt that Kelsea neatly combines a girl-next-door appeal with a model's glamorous looks.

Kelsea struck a victorious blow for females this year. As she grows and evolves as an artist, she'll likely continue to pack a loud and resounding wallop.



(Below, from left) Songwriters Forest Glen Whitehead, Josh Kerr, Kelsea Ballerini and Lance Carpenter have a pizza party to commemorate Kelsea's No. 1, "Love Me Like You Mean It."





THOMAS RHETT

"THE CHAMELEON"

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- 4 No. 1 songs, "It Goes Like This," "Get Me Some of That," "Make Me Wanna," "Crash and Burn"
- Two platinum-certified singles, "It Goes Like This," "Get Me Some of That"
- Two gold-certified singles, "Make Me Wanna," "Crash and Burn"
- First album, *It Goes Like This*, debuted at No. 2 on Top Country Albums chart and in the Top 10 of the *Billboard* 200
- Co-wrote Jason Aldean's "1994," Lee Brice's "Parking Lot Party" and Florida Georgia Line's "Round Here"
- Co-headlining the Suits & Boots Tour with Brett Eldredge this fall

It was a balancing act for Thomas Rhett to make his debut in country music—he had to figure out how to carve out his own niche without denying his obvious musical lineage. But he did it, proudly fielding questions from inquiring media about his country-star father, Rhett Akins. In doing so, Thomas Rhett made it clear that he was pursuing country music as well, but he was doing it his way.

Tapping into the diverse influences of his youth—including urban, pop, rock, R&B and, of course, country, TR has created his own hybrid musical style. Early in his career he may have been given the benefit of the doubt because of his daddy Rhett's red-hot songwriting career, but Thomas Rhett quickly stood alone as a songwriter and as a high-energy performer on tours with Lady Antebellum and Florida Georgia Line in early 2015.

Thomas Rhett's debut album, *It Goes Like This*, produced three No. 1 singles ("It Goes Like This," "Get Me Some of That" and "Make Me Wanna"), making him the first male artist to mark that accomplishment in more than two decades, and the Chris Stapleton-penned "Crash and Burn," from his sophomore album, *Tangled Up*, recently became his fourth chart-topper.

Though he's both an ACM and CMA "New Artist" nominee, Thomas Rhett revealed he doesn't take anything too seriously by appearing in Zaxby's commercials with pal (and 2014 New Artist of the Year winner) Brett Eldredge, but the chemistry between the pair is undeniable. CMT spotted that and awarded T-Rhett, as he is affectionately called, a co-headlining spot with Brett on the upcoming Suits & Boots Tour. **NCW**

(Below, from left) Songwriters Michael Carter, Rhett Akins, Cole Swindell and Thomas Rhett keep the party going while celebrating TR's No. 1 single "Get Me Some of That."





COMIN' DOWN THE PIKE

ACCORDING TO THEIR MOST RECENT MILE MARKER—A NEW SELF-TITLED ALBUM—**THE TURNPIKE TROUBADOURS** ARE HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

STORY BY JIM CASEY

Turnpike Troubadours frontman Evan Felker is cracking a cold can of Corona at his pad on a late summer afternoon (closer to noon than after) in Okemah, Okla., a town of less than 3,500 people that folk-singing icon Woody Guthrie used to call home. Nowadays, the locals are pretty proud of ol' Woody. You can find his mug adorning a downtown mural, there's a statue of him in a memo-

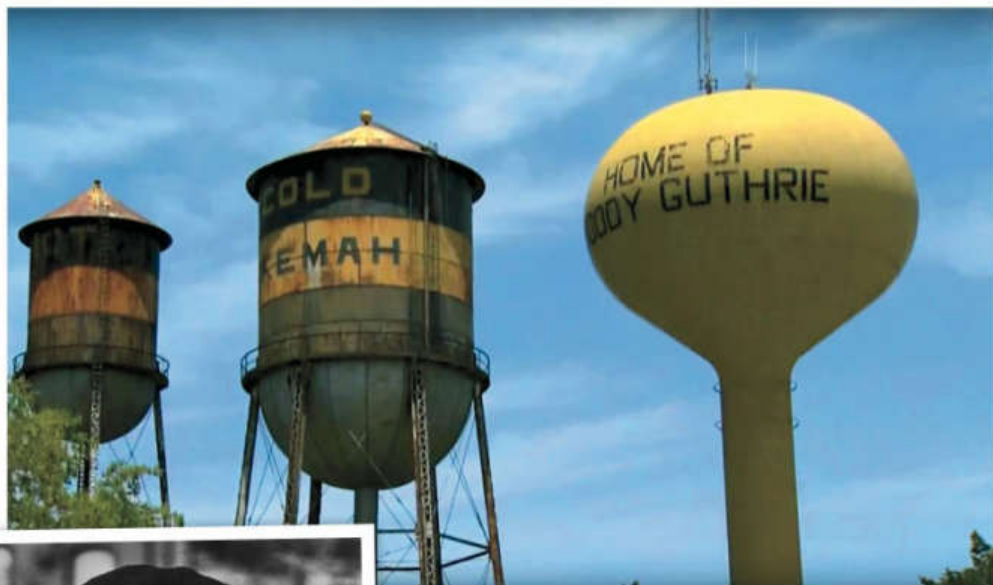
rial park and his moniker resides atop a water tower. Or, better yet, just check out Okemah's town motto: "Home of Woody Guthrie and the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival."

Evan has a long road ahead of him if he wants his name added to his hometown's motto one day, but he and his Turnpike Troubadour bandmates—Kyle Nix, Ryan Engleman, RC Edwards and Gabriel Pearson—are traveling at the optimal speed. The Red Dirt raconteurs have gone





(From left) Ryan Engleman, Gabriel Pearson, Kyle Nix, Evan Felker and RC Edwards of the Turnpike Troubadours



from 0 to 75 (that's the speed limit on their namesake Indian Nation Turnpike) since dropping their debut album, *Bossier City*, in 2007, and following it up with their sophomore effort, *Diamonds & Gasoline*, in 2010. After their acclaimed third album, *Goodbye Normal Street*, in 2012, the quintet had their work cut out for them if they wanted to create new songs as supercharged as that album's "Wrecked" and "Good Lord Lorrie." Well, crack another cold Corona in celebration, Evan, because Turnpike's new self-titled album is another seamless combination of their old-timey instrumentation (fiddle, harmonica, steel, banjo)

with a 21st-century sound and poignant storytelling.

On the heels of a weeklong tour reprieve and the release of *Turnpike Troubadours* on Sept. 18, Evan is back in Okemah on a Thursday afternoon enjoying those Coronas and playing with his new puppy, a squirrel dog that he just picked up at the airport. It may still officially be summer, but the threat of fall is in the air and there are varmints and doves and ducks to hunt soon in Oklahoma.

"I usually like to have three beers before interviews to free my mind—get my mind nimble," says Evan with an affable laugh. "You'll get some good sh*t the longer it goes."

Indeed, Evan is correct. The 45-minute interview runs the gamut of topics, everything from dove hunting ("they sure are tasty little guys") to career highlights ("selling out

Cain's Ballroom in Tulsa") to carrying the Red Dirt torch ("it's flattering to hear, but I'm not interested in saying anything like that") to his favorite songwriters.

"Jerry Jeff [Walker] and [Merle] Haggard, the songs they wrote are bulletproof," says Evan. "Marty Robbins was one of my main influences, writing those long narratives with gorgeous imagery, they're like miniature movies. I forget about Robert Earl Keen sometimes, too, about how I've gleaned from his work—or stole—but sh*t, you gotta steal from someone who's good. I love him."

Leading the charge on Turnpike's new album—and straight out of the Robert Earl Keen songwriting handbook—is the energetic barroom howler "The Mercury," which resurrects a couple of characters—Jimmy and Lorrie—from past songs "The

FOUR ON THE FLOOR

FOUR QUESTIONS WITH EVAN FELKER THAT WERE ALMOST LEFT ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR.

WHERE'D THE NAME TURNPIKE TROUBADOURS COME FROM?

"Basically a combination of an unhealthy love of Steve Earle ["Hard-core Troubadour"] and the Indian Nation Turnpike that runs through Oklahoma."

DO YOU PREFER YOUR BEER FROM A CAN?

"I do. It tastes better from a can than a bottle. I really like the Mexican beers right now, Corona and Modelo, but it's gotta be in a can."

THERE ARE LYRICS IN "TIME OF DAY" THAT SAY, SEE A CATFISH HEAD ON THE CORNER POST. WHERE'D THAT IMAGERY COME FROM?

"You've probably seen it in Tennessee—they noodle here in Oklahoma and when you catch a big one, you hang it up on the T-post of a barbed-wire fence and I always thought, 'Now that sure is something. There's a nasty, rotten catfish head on the fence,' but it's a trophy for those guys, it's the proof."

IF YOU COULD PICK ONE ARTIST, DEAD OR ALIVE, TO COVER ONE OF YOUR SONGS, WHO WOULD YOU PICK?

"Lord, that's a great question. I'd love to hear **Levon Helm** do 'Gin,

Smoke, Lies.' What about that? Like on his *Dirt Farmer* record. Wouldn't you be pretty f'in happy about that deal? That'd be neat. God rest his soul, but right before Levon died he

was putting out records, so that would have been nearly possible."



Kyle Nix (left) and RC Edwards



Evan Felker



Ryan Engleman

TURNPIKE TROUBADOURS CONTINUED Funeral" and "Good Lord Lorrie." The song has enough roadhouse swagger that it's one stanza away from Patrick Swayze spin-kicking his way into it.

"I wondered if writing about Jimmy and Lorrie again would be cool or not," says Evan. "I thought it was kinda risky. I didn't know if people would think it was just lazy and I should come up with more characters or if I could work them into sort of the canon of it all and they could exist in that universe together. I think it worked out and makes our Turnpike universe a little more interesting."

As the album progresses, the Turnpike universe gets even more interesting. The boys reveal their tender side on "A Little Song" and showcase their clever lyricism on the soothing "Time of Day" (*Hillbilly girl just as sweet as wine, grew up in a thicket like a muscadine*). In "The Bird Hunters," Turnpike makes their own Marty-esque miniature movie—set along the backdrop of a quail hunt—about dodging the bullet of

marriage, before capping the album with the spirited "Bossier City," an energetic rerecording of a song that appeared on their debut album and is a staple of their live shows.

"I'm really proud of the record, I really am," says Evan. "Our evolution has been slow. You reach a milestone by playing some huge venue or selling X-amount of records or hearing yourself on the radio, whatever it is, every band has those things in their life that they've always wanted to do. But the growth is so slow that it takes those mile markers to really take you aback enough to realize that you're actually doing something positive. Your head is down trying so hard to make forward motion that you don't realize you're doing it every day. But this album is another one of those mile markers that lets us know we're going in the right direction."

And if the boys keep heading in that direction, Okemah is going to have to change its motto to: "Home of Woody Guthrie and the Turnpike Troubadours' Evan Felker." **NCW**



perfs by Tim Mossefelder/Corbis; Levon by Keith Beatty/Corbis

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SILVER



LININGS

**Find out how LITTLE BIG TOWN's
cruel summer turned into a big blessing.**

**STORY BY
TRICIA
DESPRES**

Standing in the middle of thousands of screaming country music fans that had descended onto Nashville's LP Field during the nightly concerts of the CMA Music Festival back in June, Little Big Town's Jimi Westbrook couldn't say a word.

Literally.

"I wasn't feeling right," admits Jimi during a recent interview with *Nash Country Weekly*. "I had been to the doctor and I was pretty much on vocal rest. I was not talking when we weren't singing. We were hosting the television special, so I would say a line here and there, but besides that, I would just completely be quiet. It was a few weeks afterwards that I had the surgery."

The much-publicized surgery was necessary to remove a polyp on his

vocal cords and ultimately would remove Jimi's ability to speak for weeks and the band's ability to tour as scheduled throughout the summer months. But what the surgery took away couldn't come close to comparing to the blessings that the surgery would give the foursome of Jimi, Karen Fairchild, Kimberly Schlapman and Phillip Sweet.

Leave it to Little Big Town to find the bright side of things.

"We definitely knew there was a bigger picture to this whole thing," Karen says quietly, just a couple short hours before taking the stage at a sold-out August show at Ravinia Festival, just outside of Chicago.

"Jimi's sister is battling cancer right now. She is sick. Being at home allowed her to stay with us while she was in Nashville for treatment. We

were able to cook her breakfast and go with her to the doctor."

"We both believe that you just never know why things happen," Jimi interjects. "But we were home for the first summer in 16 years and she needed us. Plus, a lot of my family was by us because of that, so it ended up being the most time I have spent with all of them in years. It very much felt like I was able to reconnect with my family. It all works out the way it's supposed to."

"And she is doing great now," Karen says quickly of the current condition of Jimi's sister. "You always kind of want to be in tune and awake in those sorts of moments. Maybe if we were by ourselves it would be harder to make those choices, but because we are together . . ."

Karen's voice drops off for a second.



Little Big Town's Jimi Westbrook went from playing big stages to the hospital for vocal cord surgery. His wife Karen Fairchild was there every step of the way.



LITTLE BIG TOUR

Now that Jimi's been given the green light to sing, make sure to catch LBT at one of these shows.

Sept. 25

Council Bluffs, Iowa
Bayside Toyota Pavilion St. Leonard

Sept. 26

Greenwich, Conn.
Greenwich Wine and Food Festival

Sept. 27

Elmira, N.Y.
Budweiser Summer Stage

Oct. 2

Nashville
Grand Ole Opry

Oct. 8

Bemidji, Minn.
Sanford Center

Oct. 9

Ames, Iowa
Stephens Auditorium

Oct. 10

Milwaukee, Wis.
Riverside Theater

Oct. 15

Greensboro, N.C.
Greensboro Coliseum

Oct. 16

Greenville, S.C.
Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Oct. 17

St. Augustine, Fla.
St. Augustine Amphitheatre

Oct. 22

Bismarck, N.D.
Bismarck Event Center Arena

Oct. 23

Rapid City, S.D.
Barnett Arena

Oct. 24

Brookings, S.D.
Swiftel Center

Oct. 29

DeKalb, Ill.
NIU Convocation Center

Oct. 30

Bloomington, Ill.
US Cellular Coliseum

Nov. 12

Missoula, Mont.
Adams Center

Nov. 13

Boise, Idaho
Taco Bell Arena

Nov. 14

Portland, Ore.
Keller Auditorium

Nov. 19

Abbotsford, Canada
Abbotsford Centre

Nov. 20

Seattle
Paramount Theatre

Nov. 21

Spokane, Wash.
INB Performing Arts Center

LITTLE BIG TOWN CONTINUED

"These two didn't hesitate," she continues, pointing to Phillip and Kimberly in that dimly-lit backstage dressing room, brightened solely by the glow of a "Pain Killer" marquee sign and a few candles sitting on the table. "When we told them that Jimi had to have surgery, they basically were ready to support us no matter what. In this band, we take care of our health and our family first and then let the business follow. We have always done that and it's always worked for us."

She pauses. "I just know for sure that this was all a part of the story."

THE STORY OF THEIR LIVES

Of course, Little Big Town's story has never been one with clear-cut chapters and predictable happy endings. Since the band's professional inception in 2002, it's been a story of hard work and missed opportunities; this past summer—the first one they have had off the road after 16 years of summer touring—allowed the group a slew of simple summer pleasures.

Kimberly was able to attend her dear grandmother's 92nd birthday.

Phillip was able to do some summertime travel to see family.

And Karen—well, she enjoyed some quiet time in the house.

"It was very quiet in our house," recalls Karen of Jimi's vocal rest. "I mean, there is no doubt that there were some challenging times. I mean, I saw him start getting really aggravated around week three of not talking."

But also during that time came a mainstream success no one could have predicted. Namely—a controversial little song by the name of "Girl Crush," which made country music history over the summer by staying at the No. 1 spot on *Billboard's* Hot Country Songs chart for 11 consecutive weeks and setting a new record as the longest run by a group (of at least three members) in

the chart's history, ousting the previous record set by The Browns with "The Three Bells" in 1959.

"The cool thing too is the fact that we went away when ["Girl Crush"] was kind of peaking, so now we are coming back to crowds that are singing that entire song back to us," says Jimi. "There is no way to describe it. It's been unreal."

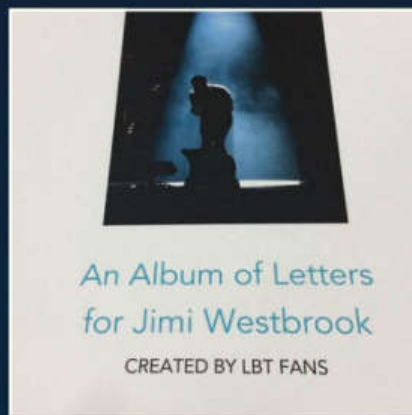
THE STORY OF MOVING ON

"I feel great," Jimi says when asked how he is feeling on this particularly chilly summer night in August. "I'm glad to be singing again. I hadn't





LBT performs at the CMA Music Festival in 2015. (Right from top) Jimi, post-surgery; Father's Day with Karen and son Elijah; fan letters



attempted a full show until earlier this week so I had a bit of that 'here we go and let's see what happens.' Yes, there was a little apprehension, but I was ready to go."

"It feels like home again," Phillip adds. "This is what we have been doing for so long, so it just feels right to be back on that stage."

And with all of this talk of doctors and surgeries, leave it to Little Big Town to have had long ago picked "Pain Killer" as their next single. "We have always loved that one from the get-go," says Karen. "As soon as we wrote it, we thought, 'Gosh, this is the

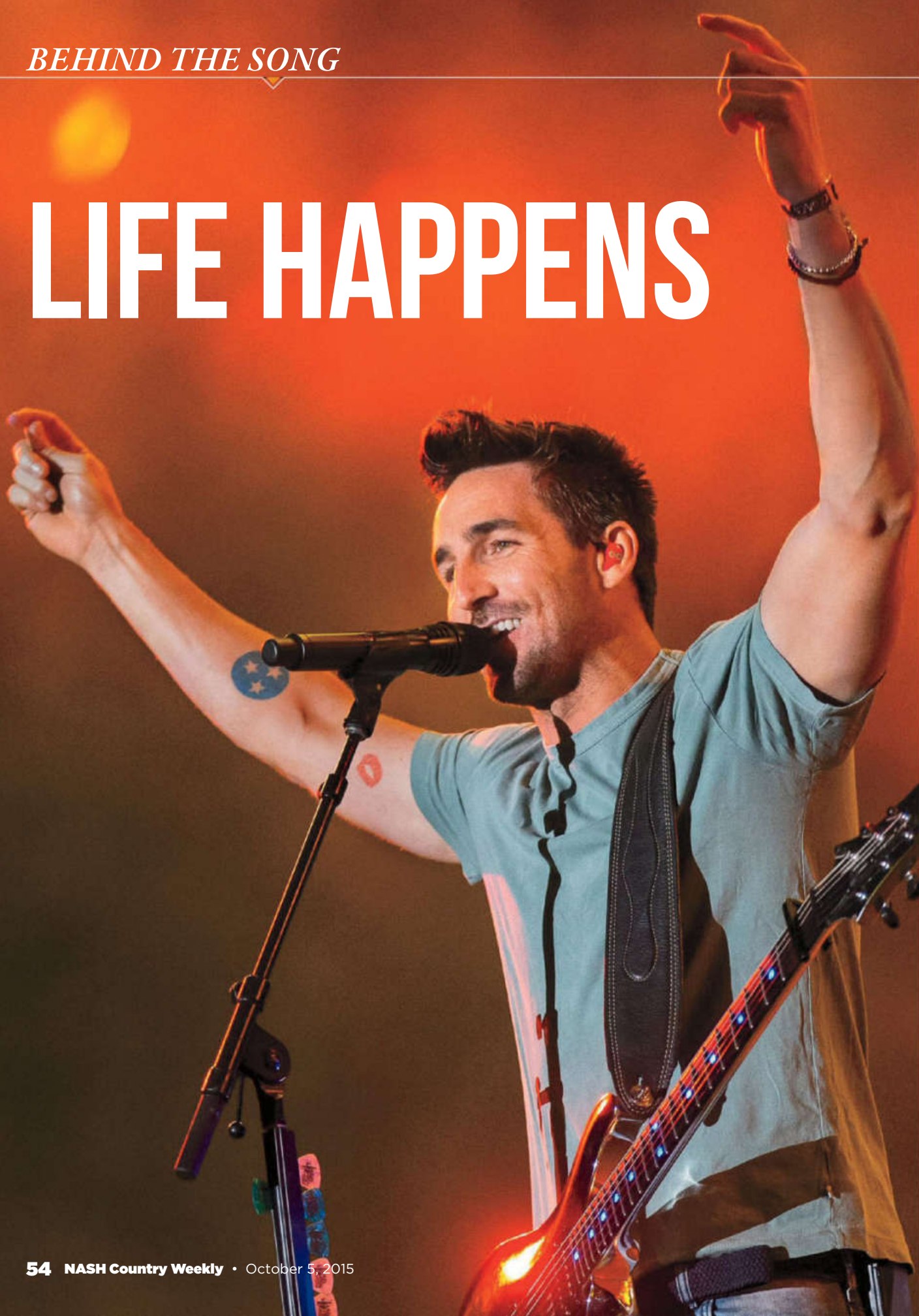
title cut of the record' and everything seemed to be centered around that title and music being your obsession and your addiction and escape. It always felt like it was a single. Of course, we never knew what was going to happen to 'Girl Crush.' We just always knew we would get to 'Pain Killer.'"

And as the four return to the stage and return to life as one of the hottest country music groups today, they find themselves thankful. Thankful for Jimi's continued recovery, which might mean a tad more vocal therapy in the coming weeks. Thankful for sold-out shows in towns where they

used to not be able to draw any. But most of all they find themselves thankful for their fans' never-wavering support. "These fans are so good to us," Jimi concludes. "A lot of them were affected with their plans because we were supposed to be doing concerts over the summer. But they walked with me through this entire process. They cared. They sent a book of letters and made a donation to the charity of our choice and they sent [our son] Elijah a Batman backpack filled with fun stuff. We will never, ever forget this summer." **NCW**

BEHIND THE SONG

LIFE HAPPENS



Hit songwriters Ashley Gorley, Ross Copperman, Shane McAnally and Josh Osborne didn't let a couple of cancellations get them down earlier this year. Ross and Ashley's scheduled third writer had to bail on their writing date and, coincidentally, the same thing happened to Shane and Josh that day. Since the four songwriters are all friends and frequent collaborators, they decided to try something new: an impromptu four-way write.

"We thought it would be the craziest day ever," says Ross, laughing.

Ross invited his friends over to his house that morning, and it didn't take long for the good times to start unfolding. Ross already had a solid track cranked up and ready to go. "I was in a little daze when I made it, so I thought there's no way they're going to like it," recalls Ross. "I played it for them anyway, and Shane jumped out of his chair and was like, 'What is that? That's what *we're* writing!'"

"We flipped out over it because it was different and sounded fresh," notes Josh. "We literally just started singing melodies over it, trying to come up with different things."

With a lighthearted vibe in the room, the friends began talking about what it was like for them growing up in small towns. As the images of a prom queen with a plastic crown, dive bars and the neighbor's pool began to come to life, they knew they were definitely onto their song for the day.

By the time they reached the chorus, the song opened up even more, allowing them to pinpoint the common thread and theme of the lyrics. "We felt like it should have a simple title like 'Real Life,'" Josh explains. "Once we had an idea of where to go with the chorus, it caused us to kind of back-track and rewrite the verses to put a lot of the word 'real' in there. Before that, it had just been scattered images that didn't necessarily connect."

Ross and Shane had already been working with Jake Owen on producing his new music, so they felt "Real Life" was something he should defi-

"REAL LIFE"

JAKE OWEN

WRITERS: Shane

McAnally, Ross Copperman, Ashley Gorley, Josh Osborne



CHORUS LINES

If you're looking at the Top 20 on any given day, there's a good chance **THE FOUR CHORUSMEN** were involved in some form or fashion. Here are just a few of the current hits they have on the charts:

"LOSE MY MIND"
Brett Eldredge
(Ross)

"GONNA WANNA TONIGHT"
Chase Rice
(Shane)

"JOHN COUGAR, JOHN DEERE, JOHN 3:16"
Keith Urban (Ross, Shane and Josh)

"NOTHIN' LIKE YOU"
Dan + Shay
(Ashley)

"YOUNG & CRAZY"
Frankie Ballard
(Ashley and Shane)

"TOP OF THE WORLD"
Tim McGraw
(Josh)

nately hear. Once Jake was able to give the demo a listen, he too agreed it was the perfect fit. Jake recorded the song for his upcoming fifth studio album and it became the project's lead single.

"Honestly, I'm sort of weirdly relieved it got cut and that it's a single," says Josh. "If you're a songwriter and you get put in the room with Shane, Ross and Ashley and you don't write something that gets cut, it's probably *your* fault!"

"We were joking that day, saying, 'Guys, if we can't get this right, we better just pack it up and go home,'" adds Shane. "So I think we were all relieved with the outcome from that day."

Since the impromptu writing session, Ross, Ashley, Shane and Josh have revisited their four-way writes on a regular basis, even coining themselves "The Four Chorusmen." "When we write together, that is what you will see on our calendar," Ross says. "And it seems to be working for us."

ALANNA CONAWAY

The week of Sept. 26, 2015

TOP 25 BILLBOARD ALBUMS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	KILL THE LIGHTS LUKE BRYAN
2	3	MONTEVALLO SAM HUNT
3	2	START HERE MADDIE & TAE
4	4	JEKYLL + HYDE ZAC BROWN BAND
5	5	THE OUTSIDERS ERIC CHURCH
6	6	ELVIS FOREVER ELVIS PRESLEY
7	7	WILD ONES KIP MOORE
8	8	ANYTHING GOES FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
9	9	PAIN KILLER LITTLE BIG TOWN
10	10	ANGELS AND ALCOHOL ALAN JACKSON
11	11	JUST AS I AM BRANTLEY GILBERT
12	12	OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT JASON ALDEAN
13	20	TRAVELLER CHRIS STAPLETON
14	16	NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL COUNTRY, VOLUME 8 • VARIOUS ARTISTS
15	15	MUD DIGGER, VOLUME 6 VARIOUS ARTISTS
16	14	CRASH MY PARTY LUKE BRYAN
17	17	PAGEANT MATERIAL KACEY MUSGRAVES
18	18	SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE JASON ISBELL
19	22	GREATEST HITS SO FAR ... ZAC BROWN BAND
20	21	IGNITE THE NIGHT CHASE RICE
21	13	SOUTHERN STYLE DARIUS RUCKER
22	25	COLE SWINDELL COLE SWINDELL
23	26	DJANGO AND JIMMIE WILLIE NELSON & MERLE HAGGARD
24	24	THE FIRST TIME KELSEA BALLERINI
25	27	GREATEST HITS: DECADE #1 CARRIE UNDERWOOD

TOP 25 BILLBOARD SINGLES

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	2	CRASH AND BURN THOMAS RHETT
2	3	JOHN COUGAR, JOHN DEERE, JOHN 3:16 • KEITH URBAN
3	4	BUY ME A BOAT CHRIS JANSON
4	6	SAVE IT FOR A RAINY DAY KENNY CHESNEY
5	7	LOSE MY MIND BRETT ELDREDGE
6	1	HELL OF A NIGHT DUSTIN LYNCH
7	5	HOUSE PARTY SAM HUNT
8	8	STRIP IT DOWN LUKE BRYAN
9	9	ANYTHING GOES FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
10	10	FLY MADDIE & TAE
11	12	GONNA WANNA TONIGHT CHASE RICE
12	14	BREAK UP WITH HIM OLD DOMINION
13	13	LET ME SEE YA GIRL COLE SWINDELL
14	17	SMOKE BREAK CARRIE UNDERWOOD
15	15	NOTHIN' LIKE YOU DAN + SHAY
16	16	GONNA BLAKE SHELTON
17	19	LONG STRETCH OF LOVE LADY ANTEBELLUM
18	18	REAL LIFE JAKE OWEN
19	22	BURNING HOUSE CAM
20	20	I'M COMIN' OVER CHRIS YOUNG
21	23	TOP OF THE WORLD TIM MCGRAW
22	27	GONNA KNOW WE WERE HERE JASON ALDEAN
23	24	RUN AWAY WITH YOU BIG & RICH
24	25	STAY A LITTLE LONGER BROTHERS OSBORNE
25	26	ALREADY CALLIN' YOU MINE PARMALEE

TOP 10 AMERICANA AIRPLAY

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE JASON ISBELL
2	2	PAGEANT MATERIAL KACEY MUSGRAVES
3	3	WATKINS FAMILY HOUR WATKINS FAMILY HOUR
4	4	DIDN'T IT RAIN AMY HELM
5	5	THE BLADE ASHLEY MONROE
6	9	LOST TIME DAVE ALVIN & PHIL ALVIN
7	6	BITTERSWEET KASEY CHAMBERS
8	7	ASHES & DUST WARREN HAYNES FEAT. RAILROAD EARTH
9	8	CALL ME INSANE DALE WATSON
10	15	JUKEHOUSE REVIVAL STATESBORO REVUE

SOURCE: AMERICANA AIRPLAY CHART

rdio TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY SONGS*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	CRUISE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
2	STRIP IT DOWN LUKE BRYAN
3	TAKE YOUR TIME SAM HUNT
4	DIAMOND RINGS AND OLD BARSTOOLS TIM MCGRAW
5	BURNING HOUSE CAM

TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY/AMERICANA/SOUTHERN ALBUMS*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	ILLINOIS BRETT ELDREDGE
2	PICKING UP THE PIECES JEWEL
3	OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT JASON ALDEAN
4	TRAVELLER CHRIS STAPLETON
5	SPEAK NOW TAYLOR SWIFT

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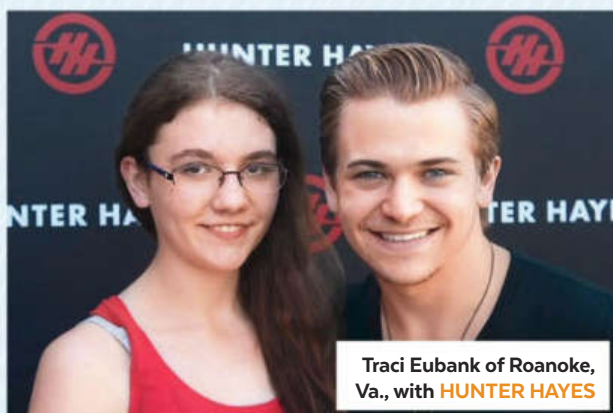
GREG BATES with Emily Wiley of Union, Maine



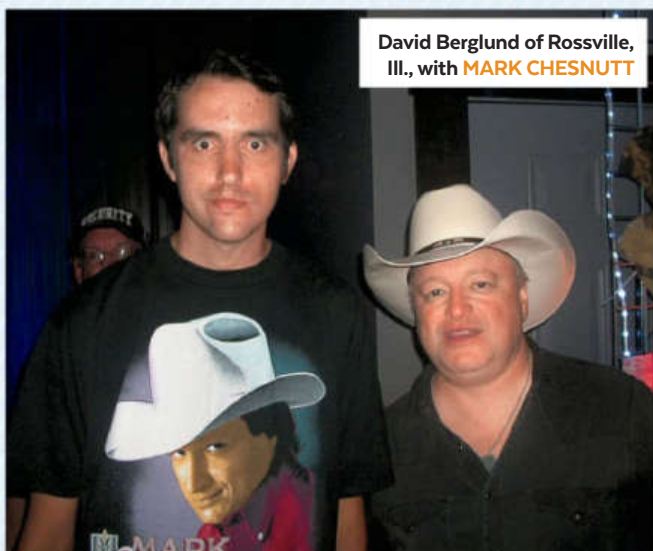
LOVE AND THEFT with Irene Jewel Willson from Orangevale, Calif.



CANAAN SMITH with DeAnna Antonicelli of Mechanicsburg, Pa.



Traci Eubank of Roanoke, Va., with **HUNTER HAYES**



David Berglund of Rossville, Ill., with **MARK CHESNUT**



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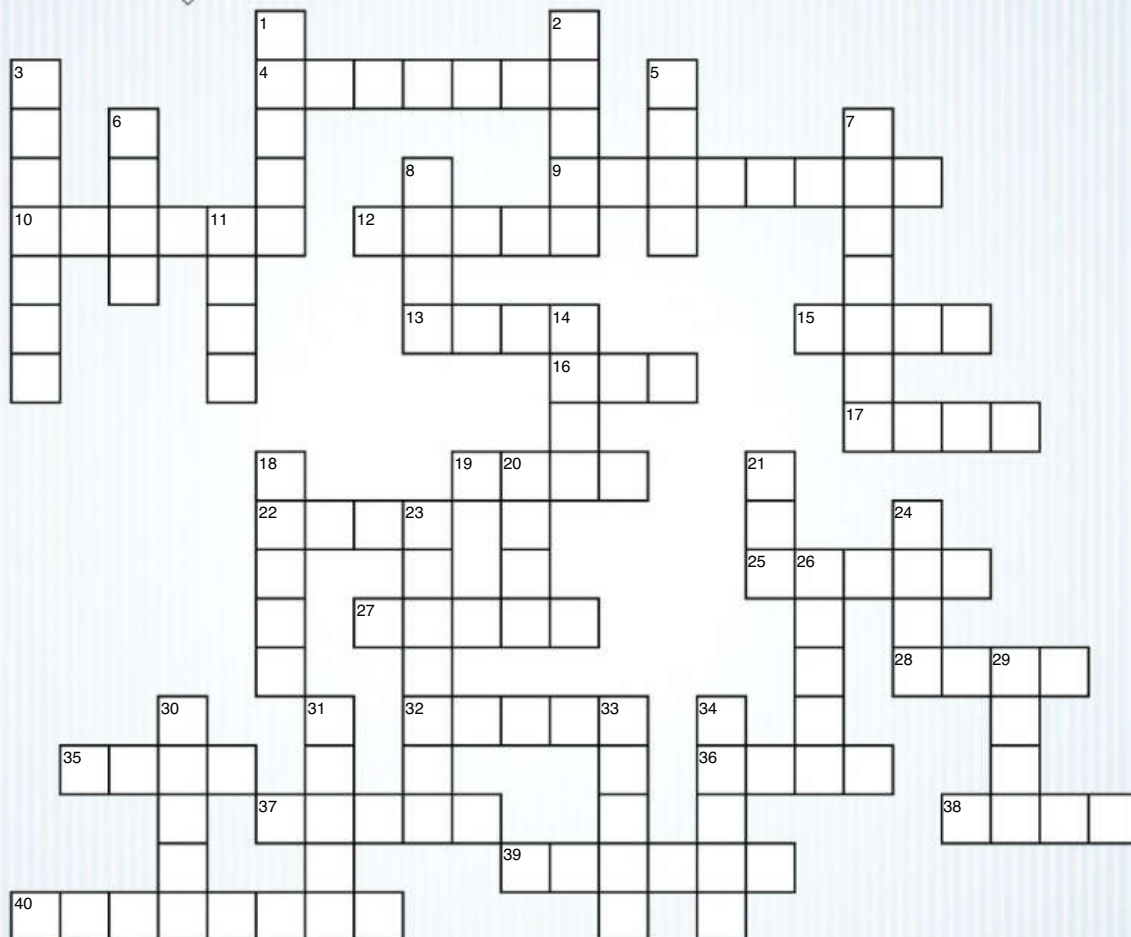
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ACROSS

- 4** Great _____ Reef in the Coral Sea
- 9** "I Am Invincible" singer
- 10** Chely Wright's "_____ White Female"
- 12** "Ten Thousand Angels" singer
- 13** "Creepin'" singer
- 15** George Jones and Merle Haggard's "Yesterday's _____"
- 16** Terri Clark's "I Wanna Do It _____"
- 17** Ricky Skaggs' "Cajun _____"
- 19** Jason Isbell's album *Something More Than _____*
- 22** Big & Rich's "_____ in This Moment"
- 25** Alabama's new album *Southern _____*
- 27** '70s hit singer Fargo
- 28** Lee Ann Womack's "A Little _____ Little Rock"
- 32** Tyler Farr's "Better in _____"
- 35** "He Gets That From Me" singer
- 36** _____ season
- 37** An unpleasantly weird or strange person (slang)
- 38** Mary Chapin Carpenter's "He Thinks He'll _____ Her"
- 39** "Any Man of Mine" singer
- 40** State bordering Pennsylvania on the south

DOWN

- 1** _____ board
- 2** "Time Marches On" singer
- 3** *War and Peace* author Leo _____
- 5** George Strait's "If You Can Do Anything _____"
- 6** Billy Currington's "Love _____ Gone"
- 7** Antwerp is here
- 8** Lorrie Morgan's "_____ Minutes"
- 11** "All My Friends Say" singer
- 14** Actress Blanchett
- 18** "Gonna" singer
- 20** NASCAR driver Newman
- 21** Toby Keith's "_____ Love Her"
- 23** Dixie Chicks' "There's Your _____"
- 24** TV show *Wife _____*
- 26** 2015 movie *Mission: Impossible - _____ Nation*
- 29** Joe Nichols' "_____ Matters (Someday)"
- 30** London's Westminster _____
- 31** Little Big Town's Fairchild
- 33** John Michael Montgomery's "I _____"
- 34** Comedian _____ C.K.



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NASH Country Weekly

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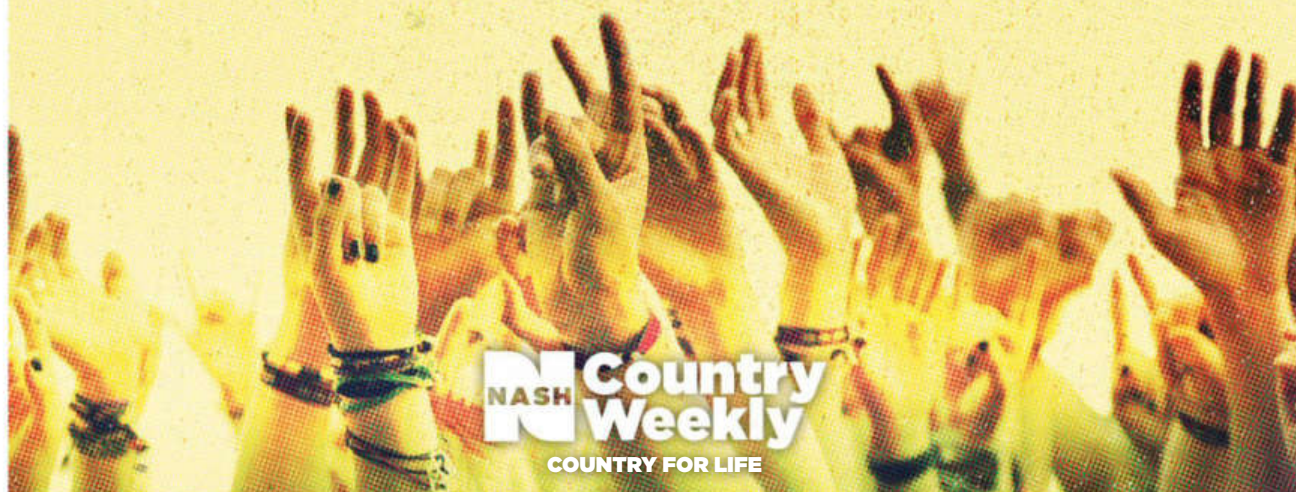
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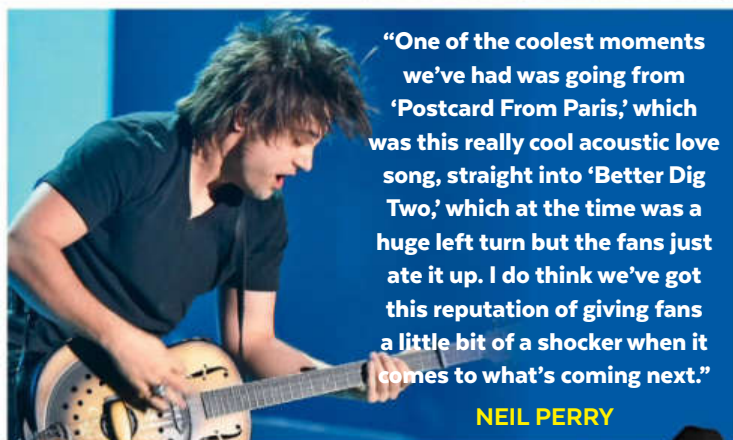
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"I'm particular in that I want to write with people who are nice. I don't want to write with any jerks. I want to write with people who bring their own thing to it, who aren't coming in and trying to write 'Better Man' again or 'Nothing But the Taillights' again."

CLINT BLACK



"One of the coolest moments we've had was going from 'Postcard From Paris,' which was this really cool acoustic love song, straight into 'Better Dig Two,' which at the time was a huge left turn but the fans just ate it up. I do think we've got this reputation of giving fans a little bit of a shocker when it comes to what's coming next."

NEIL PERRY



TROUBADOUR FACE-OFF



STEVE EARLE	ARTIST	GEORGE STRAIT
"HARD-CORE TROUBADOUR"	SONG	"TROUBADOUR"
<i>I FEEL ALRIGHT</i>	ALBUM	<i>TROUBADOUR</i>
1996	YEAR	2008
2:41	TIME	2:56
NA	BILLBOARD	#7



"I love horses and can't get enough of them. I'll never not love horses. They are so sexy. They smell good and they are beautiful when they run."

CANAAN SMITH



LBT BY THE NUMBERS

- 1 GRAMMY
- 2 BILLBOARD NO. 1 ALBUMS
- 3 HEADLINING TOURS
- 4 ACM AWARDS
- 5 2015 CMA NOMINATIONS

2015 CMA NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR NOMINEES BY AGE



MADDIE & TAE
20/20



KELSEA BALLERINI
22



THOMAS RHETT
25



SAM HUNT
30



CHRIS STAPLETON
37

CROSSWORD SOLUTION (SEE PAGE 60)



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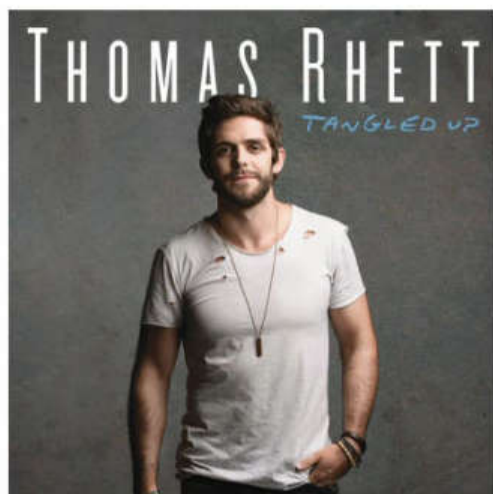
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